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# Her Own Sister

BY E. S. WILLIAMSON.



GEO. MUNRO,

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# HER OWN SISTER.

BY

EMMA SARA WILLIAMSON.



NEW YORK:  
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,  
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET,







# HER OWN SISTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

IN Sydney the dramatic season was just drawing to a close. Some few amusements still dragged on a somewhat struggling and precarious existence, but they too were beginning to pall upon the most determined lovers of gayety, when something so startling occurred that the whole city was galvanized into new life and interest.

The chief attraction at the theater most patronized that year by the fashionable world, and always celebrated—most justly—for its successful catering for the public taste, had been the *début* of two pretty sisters, daughters of a clergyman whose sudden death had left them nearly destitute. Their daring choice of a histrionic career in lieu of following more beaten tracks was considered a proof that parsons' daughters were not exempt from the proverbial wildness attributed to parsons' sons; and, while the new departure shocked some, it impressed all. Even had the young ladies not possessed decided talent, curiosity would have rendered their first appearance a success; as it was, their good looks and cleverness combined procured them quite an ovation. Nor was the furor short-lived. They played through the whole season to crowded houses, and were to leave Sydney on a tour only while the votaries of pleasure recruited their jaded health and spirits at different country places or quiet sea-side resorts.

The sisters had always acted together in the same play, and were excellent foils one to the other; Elaine Warring-



ton, the elder, being tall and slim, and her voice and features perfectly adapted to any part that required sympathetic rendering; while the younger, Ada, was *petite*, with the brightest possible eyes and a laugh that rang through the huge theater like the tones of a silver bell.

It was only natural that they should have many admirers; and, owing to the fact that some former acquaintances—people holding influential positions in the town—had taken them up, and still invited them to their houses, the attentions they received were more serious and less dangerous than those usually offered to pretty actresses unprotected by either a father's or a husband's care. Indeed much indignation had been felt by the chaperons in the place—and by some of the chaperoned too—when Gerald Weare, the son of the wealthiest ship-owner in Sydney, plainly and pointedly evinced his admiration for one of them. The question that for a long time agitated society was which of the two sisters Gerald Weare had fallen in love with, for they were always together, and consequently it was difficult to determine; one day, however, curiosity was satisfied by his assertion that he had proposed to and been accepted by Ada Warrington.

The excitement caused by this announcement had scarcely died away—had not, in fact, completed its allotted nine days of wonderment—when there came so tragic an end to the romance that every trivial feeling of envy or surprise was merged in a general thrill of horror.

Ada—pretty, *riante*, light-hearted Ada—whose dramatic triumphs had been crowned by that last and best proof of her social success, was found lying on the ground late one night in the public gardens, her soft white garments wet with a crimson stream that trickled slowly from her breast, while a pale half-moon shone upon her upturned face and gleaming golden hair.

She was dead—had been dead for an hour or more, the doctors said, shot through the heart; and the pistol which



had done the cruel deed lay only a few yards away, as though the murderer had cast it from him, mastered by an overwhelming abhorrence of the tool he had employed. This incautious act, committed as it seemed in defiance of even the commonest instincts of self-preservation, appeared to make the discovery of his identity only a matter of time. With such a clew the police could surely command success!

The inquest, held on the following morning, attracted an excited crowd; and, as fact after fact was elicited, each serving to point the finger of suspicion to one whom it seemed most terrible, most unnatural to suspect, the interest became so strained, so intense that scarcely a sound was heard in the closely packed room.

Mr. Gerald Weare was the first whose evidence was taken. He was a tall young man, about twenty-three years of age, decidedly good-looking in spite of his extreme pallor, with dark hair and mustache, and large dark expressive eyes that just then spoke only of sorrow, finely chiseled features, and a sensitive mouth that trembled convulsively as he stood up to say what he knew. That was little enough.

On the night before he had been engaged at a dinner-party, and did not get away till late. He had arranged to drive his *fiancée* home; but, though he had arrived before the time appointed, she had already left the theater.

“How did you account for that?” asked the coroner, sharply.

Mr. Weare shrugged his shoulders a little impatiently.

“I supposed it to have been the result of some discrepancy between our watches.”

“And did you not go to her house to discover if your supposition was correct?” was the coroner’s next query.

“Certainly not!” answered Mr. Weare, with some warmth. “It was past eleven o’clock, and too late to intrude upon the privacy of any ladies living alone.”

“When did you speak to her last?”—hurriedly, feeling the rebuke that had just been administered.



“I spoke to her last”—hesitatingly, and with a perceptible tremor in his pleasant voice—“in the afternoon, at rehearsal.”

“And you parted with her on good terms?”

“On the best of terms. She had promised to marry me within the month.”

There was such a sorrowful bitterness in his reply that the coroner felt it would be useless cruelty to press his inquiries further. The contrast to him between the glowing hopes of the day before and the gloomy knowledge he at that moment possessed was painful enough without being brought home more closely. Only one other question was deemed necessary.

“Do you know whose this is?”—holding out a small pistol for inspection so suddenly and so close to him that the young man shrunk back with almost a womanly cry of pain, while several near him shuddered in sympathetic horror—for was it not the weapon that had robbed him of his promised wife?

A delicate young girl who had been on the verge of tears since the proceedings began went into hysterics, and had to be carried out of court. When the excitement had subsided, the question was repeated, and Mr. Weare, having recovered himself in the interim, was able to give a composed reply.

“It is a Derringer. I have seen dozens like it.”

One of the jurymen here objected that the answer was not a direct one to the question; but the objection was waived as unimportant.

One of the men employed at the theater then deposed to having seen the two Misses Warrington leave together, and that about half an hour later Mr. Weare drove up, passed into the theater without speaking, but, as he came out again, asked him if Miss Ada Warrington had left. On hearing that she had departed with her sister, he sent away



his brougham, and expressed the intention of walking home.

The manager of the theater said that the two Misses Warrington had been engaged by him four or five months before. They were very quiet and reserved.

On being asked if they had had any admirers whom it had been found necessary to discourage, he hesitated a moment.

“You see, sir, their position was a very unusual one,” he answered slowly at last. “Every one knew who they were, they acted under their own name, and had swell friends to back them up. I don’t say they hadn’t bouquets and verses sent to them anonymously, but I don’t think they had any disagreeable adventure until—until—”

“Until when?” the coroner interposed, keenly.

“It is about a month ago,” continued the manager, “since Miss Elaine came to me in a great rage, and nearly threw up her engagement. Some one, she said, had followed them home, spoken to them in spite of their persistent coldness, and would have continued his impertinence had not a policeman fortunately come up and freed them from the annoyance. She was just furious when I told her that things of that sort must be expected in the profession which she and her sister had adopted, and wanted to cancel their engagements on the spot, till I suggested a remedy.”

“What was that?” asked the coroner, with a half smile.

“I recommended her to buy a pistol, and use it if necessary.”

“And she did that?”

“Yes.”

There was a breathless silence in the room, during which the coroner once more lifted the pistol from the table in front of him. Before, however, he had time to frame a question the witness broke out impetuously—

“Yes, it was a Derringer; but there are hundreds of



them, and— Let me have it in my hand. Merciful Heaven, it is the same! I know it by the dent upon the silver stock. The first time she fired it off she was frightened by the explosion and let the pistol drop.”

“And never took it in her hand again?” said the coroner quickly, anxious to dispel at once the painful impression caused by the last words.

The manager remained silent.

“Did she ever fire it again?”

“Before a week had passed she was as good a shot as I who taught her. She had a capital eye and wonderful nerve for a woman.”

“Ah, that was at a target or mark of some sort! Is it your belief that she would have raised it against—against her unwelcome admirer, for instance?”

“I—I don’t know. It is impossible to say.”

“Did she ever say what she would do if such a contingency occurred?”

“I asked her once whether she thought she could use it if occasion offered, and she said—”

“What did she say?”

“It is scarcely fair to answer when, as must be expected in such a case, the lightest words are apt to bear a deadly significance.”

“To withhold any knowledge you possess will do no good, and is a punishable offense,” the coroner reminded him coldly.

“She said, ‘I should use it without compunction were I so insulted again, and aim at the heart.’”

A shiver of repulsion seemed to pass simultaneously through the occupants of the room, as though they were of one body as well as of one mind. Every one remembered where the dead girl had received her hurt, and scarcely one doubted now but that her sister had fired the fatal shot. The manager of the theater was motioned to stand down.



Mrs. Day, the landlady of the house where the two girls had lodged, was then called.

The coroner's first question to her seemed to have no reference to what he had just heard.

"The two Misses Warrington have occupied your rooms since their father died, I believe?" he began; and the garrulous tongue of the landlady, never difficult to unloose, needed no further stimulus. It was evident that she at least was not unwilling to disclose all she knew.

The sisters had been most desirable lodgers, had given very little trouble and received no visitors, though they went out a great deal to big parties, she believed. They had lots of lovers, no doubt; but none ever came to the house. Miss Elaine was especially particular in that respect, though she had often heard Miss Ada laugh at her about it, and call her a prude. Several times gentlemen had called, but had been denied. Mr. Weare had been admitted only during the last week, from which she had surmised that he and one of the young ladies were going to make a match of it.

"Did you also guess which of them it was?" put in the coroner, quietly.

"No; that I could never make out. The young ladies always went about together; and even when Mr. Weare accompanied them they never separated. He often sent flowers and books or music, but they were pretty equally divided, as I happen to know, for, tidying up their room, I couldn't help seeing the bits of paper that had come with them, and sometimes it would be Miss Warrington's name upon them, and sometimes Miss Ada's."

"And the young ladies were on good terms always, never had a serious disagreement, though I suppose they had words sometimes—"

Mrs. Day broke in hastily on the coroner's gently interrogative remark—

"They were not a bit like that; Miss Elaine, though she



was a bit proud and particular, was always good to her sister; and Miss Ada was so good-tempered and cheery, nothing could put her out. They never had a quarrel while they were with me—leastways not to my knowledge—until last Friday evening, and that must have been something more than ordinary, for they did not speak to each other again after that, except when they were actually obliged, though I am sure they were dying to make it up. Miss Elaine went about looking so sad, I expect the tears were pretty near her eyes at times; and Miss Ada felt it too, I'm sure, for all she'd go singing about the house, and toss her pretty head when her sister spoke to her."

"And you've no idea what caused this estrangement?" asked the coroner.

"No," Mrs. Day replied; "I knew high words had passed between them by their manner. I was out that night, but Martha—that's the girl—said she heard one of them crying, and then Miss Ada went across the landing to her room, and stamped her foot in a regular passion, and called out to her sister, 'You're jealous—that's what it is—jealous because he preferred me to you—'"

The coroner put up his hand to stay the current of her speech.

"Martha shall give her own evidence by and by. At what time did Miss Warrington come back last night?"

"About a quarter to twelve. She was looking dreadfully white and tired, and I told her she ought to go to bed at once; but, when she heard that Miss Ada had not come in, she said she'd wait up, and that I might go; then before I'd got half-way upstairs, she called me down again, and said she'd walk a little way up the street to see if she could see her coming. It struck twelve as she went out. Then, after I'd waited a good bit, she came back looking whiter and more ghost-like than ever, and begged me to go with her toward the theater to see if we could meet Miss Ada. I went with her through the gardens, as she fancied



she'd most likely come through there, though it was the longest way; and I thought it odd. But she proved right enough, poor dear, for we had not got far before we saw the crowd; and then I knew something had happened, and so did Miss Elaine, for she caught hold of my arm and would not go on till I said it might be Miss Ada was hurt, and we'd better see. Then she came with me, and I called out for them to make way—for I felt certain somehow it was Miss Ada; and, when the poor young lady saw her sister lying there dead, she just gave a little moan, and fainted in my arms. We got a carriage that was passing and took her home; and directly she came to she asked to go to her sister, and has been by her bedside ever since—not shedding a tear, only watching her so sorrowful-like it would break your heart to see her. I made her drink a cup of tea this morning, and that's all as has passed her lips; she seemed stunned like."

"That will do," said the coroner, abruptly; and, when the landlady had been ushered out, showing evident unwillingness to go, he summoned the next witness.

This was Martha, Mrs. Day's maid of all work. She confirmed all that her mistress had said. The two Misses Warrington were the nicest young ladies she had ever had anything to do with, and very fond of each other—indeed Miss Elaine was more like a mother than a sister to Miss Ada. They had had only one quarrel, and that was on Friday night. She was quite certain it was Friday, for that was the evening on which Mrs. Day always went to see her sister, who lived at the other end of the town.

"Did you know what the quarrel was about?" inquired the coroner.

No, Martha did not know; but she could guess. It was about some young man, of course. Why? Why, because that was what girls always quarreled about; and she supposed young ladies were females as well as the "likes" of her.



A smile flitted across the coroner's grave face.

"You are evidently well acquainted with the weaknesses of your sex. Now tell me—did you overhear anything on that night to make you think you had guessed right?"

"I heard only one thing, and that was something Miss Ada said. She said quite fierce-like, 'You're jealous because he likes me better nor you.' " Then, triumphantly—"I knew it was about Mr. Weare."

"Were you up last night when Miss Warrington came in?"

"Not I. If you were on your two feet all day, you'd be glad enough to get to bed directly your work was over."

"I'm sure I should, Martha," was the pleasant reply. "And now will you go to Miss Warrington and tell her that we should like to speak to her in about half an hour?"

The girl assented cheerfully and withdrew, satisfied that she had not allowed herself to be browbeaten or intimidated by her interrogator, as some of the neighboring servants who had seen something of police-courts had predicted she would be.

The testimony of the doctor was taken, and other witnesses were called to prove that the pistol found near the murdered girl had belonged to Elaine Warrington and had been carried by her constantly since she had obtained it, and that the two girls had been on bad terms with each other during the last week, though both had tried to conceal it.

Nothing more important was elicited, and the faces of the spectators wore an expression of awed expectancy as, the last witness dismissed, the coroner, in a voice that he himself felt to be unusually solemn, called out the name of "Miss Warrington."



## CHAPTER II.

A LOW murmur of sympathetic emotion ran through the room as the door opened and Elaine Warrington entered. Some of those present had never seen her before; others, as they eagerly followed the evidence against her, had forgotten her youth and loveliness, and were impressed by them anew. For a moment at least every man and woman in the room believed her to be innocent.

She came in slowly, yet with no hesitation or apparent dread of the ordeal before her—indeed she seemed scarcely to have grasped the idea that she would have to face so many people, for her dress—a rough black serge—was that in which she had walked home on the previous night, and her bright hair was pushed back from her face and gathered into a knot behind, evidently more to keep it from troubling her than with any thought of self-adornment. The large gray eyes had a haggard and weary look, and seemed larger and more beautiful than ever by reason of the deep blue circles round them, caused by the long anxious night, during which she had neither slept nor wept.

Yet never had she looked so lovely as now, in her disordered dress, and utterly careless with respect to the impression she might make. No wonder a sudden reaction of feeling set in as she stood there so utterly alone, her slim figure, in its dark garb, clearly defined against the pale-colored wall, the small white hands clasped loosely in front of her, half hidden in the folds of her thick gown!

An elderly gentleman who had taken deep interest in the proceedings started forward eagerly and offered her his chair.

She thanked him sweetly, if somewhat absently, but did not sit down. She stood behind it, resting her fingers on



the back rail; and to some of the spectators it seemed as though she were already in the prisoner's dock, standing on her trial. What would be her defense?

The coroner put his first question.

"Miss Warrington, can you tell me the date of your sister's engagement to Mr. Weare?"

She looked at him for the first time, and then slowly surveyed the jury, almost as though challenging the man's right to speak to her and her obligation to reply in presence of so many people. The question was repeated with an emphasis which she could not disregard.

"Last Friday, I believe. It was then my sister told me."

If her loveliness had already touched the hearts of those present, the sound of her voice completed the charm. It was low and sweet, yet so clear that it was audible at the furthest end of the room. As it rose and fell there was something exquisitely tuneful and caressingly tender in its cadence. Even the coroner, a man not overburdened with either sentimental feeling or culture, felt its power, and waited till the last echo had died away before he put his next question—

"And it came upon you as a surprise?"

"Y-e-s."

"You did not know that he thought of proposing to her?"

"N-o"—still with evident hesitation; and then, with a gleam of defiance—"How should I?"

"Of course not. His attentions were, I believe, so equally divided that no one seems to have known for whom they were especially intended. Perhaps you yourself were also in the dark?"

The blood rushed to the girl's face, and something rising in her throat prevented an immediate rejoinder; then she said, with simple dignity ignoring the wound to her modesty and pride—



"I never thought about it, nor did Ada, till—till he spoke."

"You disapproved of the match?"

"That would have been rather a senseless thing on my part, don't you think," she returned, evasively, "seeing that I had no power to prevent it? Besides, Mr. Weare was rich and well connected; it was more for his friends to object than for me."

The reply, reasonable as it was, told against her. Its premeditation was too apparent.

There was a perceptible change in the coroner's manner as he continued his examination.

"Then what was the cause of your quarrel on Friday night?"

The girl started nervously and bit her lip.

"Was it about Mr. Weare?"

No reply; but throughout the small hurriedly formed court silence was taken to mean assent.

"I decline to tell you anything of a conversation that was strictly private," she said at last, with an effort.

"I must warn you, in your own interests, Miss Warrington, that this silence is ill-judged, and may be misunderstood," said the coroner, severely.

"I am not afraid of what people may think or say. Anything I can tell you connected with my sister's death I will certainly not withhold, but the conversation referred to occurred a week ago, and has nothing to do with it."

Elaine's manner was calm, firm, almost defiant.

"That you should allow us to judge," suggested the coroner; but, when the girl maintained an obstinate silence, either from courtesy or from pity he refrained from pressing the question.

"This pistol is said to be yours," he observed, changing the subject abruptly, and touching the weapon as he spoke.

She stretched out her hand for it.



“Yes, it is mine,” she assented, after a very slight inspection. “Where did you find it?”

“Near the place where your sister was found dead last night.”

The girl stared at him helplessly, the pallor of her face rendered yet more noticeable by the crimson of her parted lips and her dark be-ringed eyes.

There was intense excitement, and the coroner could not resist a dramatic *denouement*. He might defeat the end in view by placing her on her guard, but the odds with a nervous overwrought woman were in favor of a venture.

“There is no doubt,” he declared, gravely, “that it was the instrument which caused your sister’s death.”

“Oh, no—no—no!”

She had fallen upon her knees, and sobbed rather than spoke the words in a paroxysm of horror—or was it fear? Her head was buried in her hands, so no one could see the expression of her face, for all present in the room were straining forward with a curiosity that overpowered every instinct of humanity and pity.

The elderly gentleman who had offered her a chair on her first entrance came nearer to her, unnoticed in the general movement.

“You lost it—mis-laid it,” he said, in a low voice, as though speaking to himself, yet intending the remark for her.

“I must have left it at the theater last night!” she gasped, in a whisper, answering him perhaps—or was it merely a prompt adoption of his suggestion?

“I beg your pardon—may I request you to speak a little louder?” said the coroner.

More composed now, the girl repeated what she had just said, but without uncovering her face. Had she guessed to what all these questions were leading, what was the terrible suspicion that was gradually growing and establishing itself in men’s minds?



“Yet you had carried it habitually for nearly a month? How came you to forget it?”

She raised her head and met his eyes with an effort.

“My sister was anxious to leave, and, in hurrying, I must have overlooked it.”

“Yet she had an appointment with Mr. Weare to wait for and drive home with him?”

“She did not tell me so.”

“Then you started from the theater together?”

She was standing now once more, composed and self-reliant, and merely answered by a bow.

“Then where and why did you part?”

“My sister wished to walk through the gardens.”

“And you refused to accompany her?”

“She did not ask me to do so.”

“Were you in the habit of separating so?”

“We had never done so before.”

“And did you ask her her reason for wishing to go alone then?”

Her lips quivered piteously, as though through some sorrowful recollection.

“You know—some one has told you—that we had had a disagreement,” she reminded the coroner, nervously.

“That was last Friday. It must have been a serious difference of opinion not to have righted itself quickly.”

“It was a serious difference of opinion.”

“Yet you decline to tell me its origin or cause?”

“Indeed—indeed it has nothing to do with the cause of my sister’s death!” she protested, earnestly.

“And there is no one that you know who had reason to dislike her—who had sufficient motive, in fact, for committing such a crime?”

She shook her head in emphatic denial.

“There is no one—no one,” she replied, in a tone of such deep conviction that it seemed almost as though she



were anxious to persuade herself as well as those around her.

“And you were the last to see her alive?” observed the coroner, meditatively, not perceiving at the moment the full force and significance of his remark.

But the young actress, with a woman's natural quickness, saw her danger at once, and shrunk back trembling, her hands upraised as though to ward off a blow.

“Not—not the last!” she whispered, hoarsely.

Her slight figure swayed reed-like to and fro, and her lovely eyes were raised imploringly to the man who stood before her as her judge.

He corrected himself at once, his correction not entirely uninfluenced by her beauty and her pathetic look.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Warrington—I should have said the last person we know of as yet. May I ask at about what time you left the theater?”

“At eleven o'clock. My sister looked at her watch and told me that was the time.”

One of the jurymen leaned forward and whispered something in the coroner's ear; and, acting apparently on the hint received, he continued—

“And, according to the evidence, you arrived at your house about an hour later? What is the time you allow yourself usually for the walk to or from the theater?”

“About a quarter of an hour.”

“Yet last night you took at least thrice as long?”

“I was walking up and down the street waiting for her.”

“And yet, when you went in, you asked if she had returned?”

“I—I thought I might have missed her.”

The coroner's face betrayed an amount of incredulity which he did not venture to express.

“That will do, Miss Warrington; I have no further inquiries to make. I will not detain you any longer.”



“May I go?” she asked, with an eagerness tinged slightly with surprise.

“Yes, you may go.”

She turned to leave the room with a lighter tread and a more erect bearing than those with which she had entered it. At the door she half turned and surveyed the crowd of which she had been the central figure. Her slow gaze rested last upon the gentleman who had twice come to her assistance. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, she withdrew.

Though the tide of public opinion had wavered, even turned once or twice as the inquiry proceeded, there was not one person now in the room but thought her guilty; yet when she had gone no one hastened to express his opinion to his neighbor. The sympathy she excited overcame the first strong feeling of righteous indignation. Every one was hoping that others had been less clear-sighted, and that some strong doubt might prevent the coroner from putting their conviction into words. She was so young, so lovely, so weak and womanly—could any one have the heart to condemn her to a cruel death, or a still more cruel incarceration with others more hardened, more accustomed to crime? And she had had so strong a provocation! Every one joined in blaming Gerald Weare for his culpable hesitation between the two sisters and tardy declaration of his intentions. And who knew but that on that fatal night, in her light-hearted carelessness, Ada might once again have taunted her sister with being jealous of her triumph, and drawn her doom upon herself?

What would the jury decide? Would the guilt be fixed upon any one now, or the verdict be delayed till the police had collected further facts? It was a fearful thing to accuse any woman of so terrible a crime without strong unquestionable proofs. No mere circumstantial evidence could justify such an act.



Whether from some such consideration or from pure compassion, the verdict given was the simple one, "Willful murder against some person or persons unknown;" and, curiously enough, though it clashed with the opinion of most present, not a word of dissent was heard. The crowd dispersed with wonderful quietude; only two or three, with bated breath, whispered the different conclusion to which they had been forced to come. But for the present it was all over; no more could be done now, whatever might happen later. In a few minutes the room was almost empty.

As the chief of the police, who had been watching the case, turned away after a short, low-toned discussion with the coroner, the elderly gentleman who was apparently interested in the case of the suspected girl came up and addressed him.

"What is to be the next move?" he asked, carelessly.

"A bad one for the poor girl, I am afraid. The evidence against her is too strong to be ignored."

"Circumstantial!"—despairingly.

"Well, all evidence of the kind is, more or less. It is not often that any one actually sees a murder committed. It seemed scarcely fair to question her to-day; for she hardly attempted a defense. She was on her trial without the benefit of a lawyer's advice, and she seemed to be scarcely aware that she was not obliged to incriminate herself."

"You believe her to be the murderess?"

"I am reluctant to say so much after the verdict pronounced; but any one might have been moved by the girl's beauty and helpless position."

"Give me your opinion—in confidence," requested the other, with a strange persistence.

"Well, if I must say the truth, I have no doubt in my own mind but that under strong provocation—for that young fellow behaved shamefully, and was not half shown



up as he ought to have been to-day—Elaine Warrington was the murderess, the motive being jealousy.”

The elderly gentleman muttered something unintelligible and hurried away. Once in the hall, he looked round cautiously, and, finding himself unobserved, took the turning not toward the street-door, but toward the stairs which led to the upper landing where the two sisters had dwelt for five months together, and where now the living kept her sad watch by the dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next morning conjecture became certainty, for Elaine Warrington had disappeared as completely as though she had never been in Sydney; and such an escape could be viewed only as a confession of guilt. She had not dared to stay and stand her trial.

A ship had left on the evening before for London, and another in the early morning for Ostend; but no one answering to her description had embarked, and subsequent inquiries gave no clew.

The landlady and the servant had both supposed her to be in her sister's room, or at any rate declared so. Whether they had assisted her in her flight or had really known nothing about it could not be discovered.

The one fact remained, that Ada Warrington was dead, and Elaine, her supposed murderess, had fled, none knew whither; and her friends could only hope that her whereabouts might remain unknown, for a warrant was out for her apprehension, and her capture would have meant a concluding act to the drama far too terrible for any to desire.

The two sisters had trodden the stage for the last time. Next season others would take their places, and in their turn delight the patrons of the drama.



## CHAPTER III.

A WINTERY sun was sinking behind a belt of leafless trees one afternoon in February when the newly installed master of Gorst Abbey left his stately home, to which he still felt strange and unaccustomed, and sauntered slowly through the grounds of the estate in the direction of the Dower House.

Until three months before George Severn had been second in command of a Bengal cavalry regiment, and had in consequence spent the best part of his life in India. As a subaltern he had married on his pay, and, though his wife had not lived to see the anniversary of their wedding-day, she left him an infant son for whom it was necessary to economize and amass as many rupees as practicable. For his sake he had denied himself all the luxuries and many of what by some are deemed the necessities of life. His devotion to his child had been touching to witness; yet, though the boy was naturally winning and made many friends who had been glad to be good to him, if only for the sake of attracting the handsome widower, none of them by these attentions had managed to reach the father's heart. He was grateful—deeply grateful—to them for their kindness; but to his partial eyes it seemed as though such kindness bore its own reward in the prettily lisped thanks and somewhat easily won affection of the child on whom it was lavished. Nor did it ever strike him that he needed some one to help him to take care of his idol. He taught him to walk and talk, and by and by to ride on a miniature pony; and, when he needed to learn more than these simple acquirements, it was the devoted father who taught him still.

Always in his sight, the baby had almost imperceptibly



merged into a tall pale boy some nine years old before Captain Severn began to realize that they, hitherto inseparable, must part—not for a few months, as had been the case before, when it was necessary that the child should escape from the burning heat of the plains, and his father had not been able to get leave, but it might be for years.

The blow, terrible as it was at first, grew harder for the lonely man to bear as little by little they drifted further and further apart in spite of the constant correspondence they kept up. After a few years at a preparatory school, the lad had gone to Harrow, and had made many friends there, while amongst new interests he had half forgotten the love which had colored all his life before.

The father felt with a twinge of pain that he might meet his son—his son to whom for nine years he had been all in all—in the street and not recognize him, though his whole soul yearned for him and he was never absent from his thoughts. He had given him the love of a life-time—the deep strong love of a man which in most cases is divided, but in this case had been shared by none other; for his wife he had married from pity, because they told him she loved him, and would waste away if he offered no return. So he cared for the little fragile thoughtless child as tenderly as a woman could have done during the few short months she was with him, and even felt a faint sense of loneliness when she was gone. But that passed away; the one abiding passion of his manhood was to lavish all his love upon his son.

Then a cousin died—a man whom he had never met—indeed had scarcely heard of in the years he had spent away from home, but who had nevertheless left him the property of Gorst Abbey.

It was a splendid estate, but the last owner had led a wild extravagant life, and at present it was heavily mortgaged. George Severn's first thought was to clear off all the debts, so that the property might recover itself and be



at its highest value when it should descend to his heir. To this end he had devoted all his savings, for this reason he had resolved to let the Dower House, and since his accession had been living as quietly as possible in his new home.

His son had left Harrow a year before, and was now abroad with a tutor; eventually he was to become a barrister—for Colonel Severn was too wise to allow him to lead an aimless life. Father and son had met once since their first parting, now twelve years back; but to George Severn the meeting caused at first an even deeper feeling of sadness than the separation had done. They were utter strangers to each other, the very effort to be at ease one with the other occasioning a greater restraint. The young fellow had made no allowance for the change sure to be effected by so long a residence in an unhealthy climate; he was disappointed and sensibly chilled at meeting one so much older and graver than the father he remembered; while the elder man looked in vain for those traits of character, the little tricks of expression, that he had noted and been so proud of before.

He was proud of his son still, and had good cause for that pride—thank Heaven!—but there was a barrier between them that nothing could remove. His love for him was as great as ever, for it was too strong to be easily uprooted—and few people met Charlie Severn without being favorably impressed by his pleasant boyish manner and handsome face; but the love no longer filled his life, was no longer all-sufficient. He felt lonely and sorrowful—lonelier, in spite of neighbors who made every effort to be sociable, than he had ever been when shut up in his Indian bungalow day after day through the long hot weather, and more sorrowful even than when he had sent away his child. Then he had had hope to sustain him, and fond imaginings to take the place of reality. Now he knew the truth—knew that the fruit whose growth he had so eagerly antici-



pated had, in spite of its fair appearance, crumbled to ashes in his mouth.

As he stood on the threshold of the door of the Dower House, and turned his face to where the sun had set, the after-glow shed its red light upon him, and showed clearly the dark steadfast eyes and well-cut mouth with the deep lines of anxiety about them. His complexion was sallow, his mustache dark, but his hair was nearly white, which, with his tall broad figure and military bearing, gave him a most distinguished appearance. He was a man who would have attracted attention anywhere.

On this particular day his new tenant was expected—Mr. Bowyer by name—an Australian lawyer who, having made his fortune, wished to come and spend the last years of his life in the mother-country. The Anglo-Indian felt a warm sympathy for him, for both had been exiled from early youth, and both probably had the same feeling of alienation engendered by long absence.

It was this event that had caused Colonel Severn to walk over so that he might be there when the traveler arrived and accord him at least a stranger's welcome. He had had the house put thoroughly in order; and the fire-light shining through the window gave the place so homelike and bright a look that he found it in his heart to wish he had taken up his residence there, and had let the big rambling mansion he inhabited now, which seemed so empty and so cheerless. However, Charlie would be there soon, and his young presence would infuse a little life into the place.

A hired vehicle drove along the road and stopped at the gate, the driver waiting for instructions. The door of the conveyance was opened, and an old man stepped slowly out, and then turned to offer his assistance to some one inside.

Colonel Severn's first impulse was to draw back and make his way home unobserved. The man was not



alone, not so friendless as he had imagined, and might even look upon his presence there as an intrusion rather than an act of courtesy.

An elderly woman, apparently a superior sort of housekeeper, got out, and immediately began to give directions to the driver in a shrill overbearing voice that grated on the colonel's ears, and afterward came a tall slim girl in deep mourning, with uncovered head, holding her hat in her hand. She stood a little way apart, absently brushing the dust from her dress, taking no interest in the matters that were being discussed, not even looking round to see what manner of place was this, her new home.

Colonel Severn, after a few moments' hesitation, stepped forward.

"Mr. Bowyer, I presume?" he said, pleasantly, and raised his hat. "I am Colonel Severn; my own house is close to this; and I thought I would come over to see if I could be of any use."

The Australian was pleased at the attention, acknowledging his appreciation in his reply; and the two gentlemen turned toward the house, talking as they went.

The young girl still stood alone, apparently abstracted, until the housekeeper broke into her reverie with a loud laugh.

"Dreaming again, Miss Ellen? I don't believe you even noticed Mr. Bowyer had gone in. He'll be calling for you directly."

The remark was perhaps meant in kindness; if so, the woman's expression did not do justice to her intention, for a disagreeable flash came from beneath her eyelids, and she who was addressed winced perceptibly.

"I'll go to him now," she answered hurriedly, and moved away.

The housekeeper watched her as she went.

"Yes, I am certainly right," she muttered to herself. "She has got a secret—a secret that weighs on her night



and day, and would ruin her if found out. At hotels and constantly on the move, I have had no chance of discovering what it is—she has kept so much by herself; but here in this quiet place she will be off her guard. She shall never stand in my shoes if I can get a chance to oust her! It would be hard if ten years' faithful service were to be forgotten for this new fancy. It shall never be—never if I can help it!"

She screwed her thin lips together and clinched her hands in fierce determination, then the next moment showed the power of dissimulation that she possessed by turning toward the servant who came running briskly from the house, and giving her the necessary orders about the luggage in a composed manner that showed nothing of the jealous wrath she really felt. Formerly she had been undisputed mistress of Mr. Bowyer's house, and, being a connection of his, had half ignored the fact that she was his housekeeper as well, with no other source of income than the wages she received.

She had been a bar-maid in Montreal, where Mr. Bowyer's younger brother first met her, and, falling desperately in love with her, married her. He had lived only a few years—though long enough to repent his infatuation—and had left her so well provided for that she had had no difficulty in finding a second husband. From the crowd of needy adventurers who soon surrounded her she chose an Italian named Priolo, some years younger than herself, crafty and unscrupulous, scarcely even pretending to return the affection she professed for him. They were married, and a month later he absconded, taking with him her whole fortune, which he had managed to have transferred to his own hands. She was left so utterly destitute that no course remained but to write to the brother of her first husband and state her claim to his pity.

He answered by offering her the situation of housekeeper, which she gladly accepted, meaning in time to



sink the menial position in the more honorable one of sister-in-law and natural mistress of his house. At first she may have had thoughts of inducing him to marry her, but these she was reluctantly compelled to abandon in the early days of their acquaintance; and she soon found that it would be more difficult to carry out her plans than she had expected. The rough life that the Australian settler had led, though it had rendered his manners blunt and his tastes less fastidious, had not quite deadened the natural instincts of his order; when there was none of his own class with whom he could associate, he preferred solitude to uncongenial companionship. It was as the quondam bar-maid of Montreal, his present housekeeper, and not as his brother's widow, that he treated Mrs. Priolo; and she was too keen-sighted not to perceive this, and too clever to attempt openly to thwart his course of action.

She had been with him nearly nine years, when, after a severe illness, through which she had nursed him with exemplary fortitude and care, Mr. Bowyer determined to make his will, and summoned a lawyer for that purpose. During the interview, which was a long one, the housekeeper, unable to control her curiosity, crept noiselessly upstairs, and stood for awhile with her ear to the key-hole. What she heard amply repaid her for her patience.

"To Harriet Priolo. She is my sister-in-law as well as my housekeeper—the only connection I have in the world," the old man said; and the woman went back to her room trembling with excitement. Once more she would possess wealth; and the next time she would know how to keep it.

After that illness Mr. Bowyer realized his fortune with the intention of returning to his native land. Mrs. Priolo accompanied him to Sydney, their passages being already taken in a ship bound for Marseilles. On the day before they were to sail the old man went out on business, but he never came back to the hotel. Mrs. Priolo received a let-



ter from him the next day, however, saying that he had been unexpectedly called away, and inclosing money for her expenses until he should write to her to join him. This he did three months later; but great was the housekeeper's disgust to find that she no longer ruled alone—that a young lady in deep mourning, introduced to her as “Miss Ellen Warde—my niece,” had been with him during her absence.

Since then they had traveled about together, never staying long in one place, and shunning society in a way that was natural enough to Mr. Bowyer, but seemed strange in so young a girl as Miss Warde. It might have been accounted for by her evidently recent loss; but Mrs. Priolo felt a spiteful conviction that this was not the only reason.

There was some mystery, and it should be the business of her life to find it out. She remembered well his words—“the only connection I have in the world;” and now this niece had appeared from Heaven knew where? In the relationship she did not believe one whit; and the girl scarcely attempted to keep up the fiction, for she seldom called him “uncle,” and then always in an apologetic tone which contradicted her own words.

But, whatever the link between the two, it was a close one, for the old man was evidently fond of her, and she spent her whole time—all the time at least that was not given to dreaming—in striving to afford him pleasure. She sung to him, read to him, always found him the latest newspaper, and secured for him on all occasions the most comfortable seat with a devotion that put the housekeeper's somewhat mechanical servitude completely in the shade. Mr. Bowyer turned to Miss Ellen for everything, and Mrs. Priolo was kept more strictly than ever in the place he had assigned to her.

Growing more uneasy day by day over the change of affairs, it became a lively source of dread to her whether



this girl might not supplant her in the future as well as in the present. Would she succeed to the old man's money at his death? Not if she—Harriet Priolo—could prevent it!

“It shall never be so—never!” she said to herself with ever-increasing vehemence, as in the gathering darkness she looked toward the house which in the future was to be their home.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

As Miss Warde entered the sitting-room, both gentlemen stood up to greet her, and Mr. Bowyer introduced her to his landlord with the customary formula—

“My niece, Miss Warde.”

With a fleeting smile she acknowledged Colonel Severn's deep bow and pleasantly spoken words, then busied herself about the old man's comfort, taking a cushion from the sofa and placing it on his chair, pushing a foot-stool toward him, and then stooping to stir the fire. The flames leaped up and threw a bright glow upon her face, causing the dark gray eyes to gleam and giving color to her lips and cheeks. Her flaxen hair, which she wore in boyish fashion, cut close to her head, shone like threads of gold in the light, all the more from contrast with the soft black crape gown that she wore, unrelieved by even a speck of white.

“How lovely she would be if she were happier!” thought George Severn as he gazed at her, for the smile that had so swiftly illumined and then passed from her face had only served to impress more clearly upon him its habitual sadness. Surely some great grief must have entered her life to turn all the natural gayety and hopefulness of youth to such all-absorbing sorrow; or the loss she had evidently sustained was of very recent date, and this was the first violence of despair!



"I wonder if you will like Littlehaven?" he began, addressing her abruptly, and, in the deep interest he felt, unconscious that he had left a remark of Mr. Bowyer's unanswered.

"Oh, I think so! Why should I not?"

"I hope there will be no reason. It is dull perhaps—very little society—"

"My niece does not care for going out," put in Mr. Bowyer.

"There are some lovely walks and drives; and the garden will give you a little occupation."

"Is there a garden?" she asked, indifferently.

Mr. Bowyer looked at her somewhat impatiently.

"My dear Ellen, you passed through it as you came in—a charming garden, and so well cared for—quite a blaze of crocuses already!"

The girl flushed crimson. She turned toward Colonel Severn with a pretty deprecating gesture, as though conscious of and apologetic for a fault.

"It was growing dark when I came in, and I was thinking of other things; but I remember a sweet scent of violets—and were there not some snow-drops as well? I am very fond of flowers."

The last remark was one that Colonel Severn had heard some dozens of times during his life, and had always considered an inevitable commonplace in the mouth of a young lady; but it fell with an entirely new significance from her lips, and he was glad she had shown him one way by which he could gratify her tastes.

"Then you must not pluck the few you have here. I will send you a basket every day from the Abbey—enough to decorate your house."

She thanked him with a glance, understanding his intention to be kind, and feeling grateful to him for it.

The hands of the small traveling-clock which Mr. Bowyer had placed on the mantel-piece were pointing to six



o'clock; the visitor rose to take his leave, feeling that he had no longer any excuse for remaining.

A cordial hand-shake from the Australian, a smile from his niece, and George Severn was alone outside, walking rapidly toward the Abbey, shrinking as he had never done before from the lonely grandeur that awaited him, and realizing how utterly unlike it was to any preconceived idea he might once have had of home. Ah, well, when Charlie came, it would be different! But how lonely that girl was! What could be the cause of such poignant, apparently all-engrossing grief?—for that it was no ordinary trouble he could not fail to guess. Whenever she was not actually speaking, her thoughts seemed to wander far away to some painful incident in the past, the memory of which caused the dark eyes to open wide and the color to recede even further from her cheeks. She was a mystery—a mystery well worth studying.

“I wonder what Charlie will think of her?” he thought; and then another question presented itself which made him draw his breath hard and a dark flush suffuse his sallow fare even in the darkness—“What would she think of Charlie?”

In the meantime, at the Dower House, Mrs. Priolo, who, with all her faults, was certainly an excellent manager, had reduced the chaos of the traveler's luggage to at least a semblance of order, and was now superintending cooking arrangements below.

Mr. Bowyer and his niece were seated together before the fire, the former looking idly over a newspaper the contents of which he had already mastered in the train, the latter, making no pretense at occupation, seated on a low stool, with her elbows on her knees, her head resting on her hands, staring at the glowing embers that burned brightly beneath an upper crust of coal. Suddenly dropping his paper, her companion startled her by taking up the poker and thrusting it into the fire, so that the fairy-like cavern



into which she had been gazing was destroyed, and darkness and brightness intermingled lost the beauty they had possessed in contrast.

The girl called Ellen Warde looked up and sighed.

“Do you want anything, Mr. Bowyer?”

“No, no!”—testily. “Why don’t you call me ‘uncle’? It makes people talk when I introduce you as my niece, and yet you always call me by my formal name.”

“I forget, sir. It is not because I do not love you and am not grateful for your goodness. If that were all, I might call you ‘father’—and it would be no untruth, for no parent could have done more for me than you.”

“Nonsense, child! Why do you go back to that? Has anything happened to-night to make you recall what is past and done with?”

She shook her head.

“It is coming here, I think—settling down at last after more than a year of hotels and lodgings. The last home I had was before my father died; and we lived together—oh, so peacefully and happily!—without even a presentiment of the dreadful tragedy to come.”

“And here too you may be peaceful and happy,” he suggested, with a gentleness that contrasted greatly with his usually blunt unsympathetic manner.

She stood up excitedly and pushed away the stool on which she had been seated.

“Peaceful,” she repeated, with almost an accent of scorn—“peaceful, with the constant fear of detection hanging over me! And how can I be happy, remorseful as I am?”

He looked at her keenly, and in his turn repeated a word that she had used, and which aroused a doubt he was half afraid to acknowledge.

“Remorseful!”

She was pacing the room with quick uneven steps, her arms first across her breast, then thrown behind her, as



though she were striving to cast from her the thoughts that tormented her.

“My own sister!” she cried, passionately. “Oh, it would have been better, far better, had I stayed and—and met the worst than escaped for this!”

“Do you blame me for the part I took in your escape?”

She sunk down upon her knees beside him and looked up into his face with something of the mute devotion of a dog.

“Can I ever forget,” she said, “that dreadful day when, still unnerved and terrified because of my sister’s cruel death, I came down to the inquiry? At first I scarcely noticed the crowd—I was rapt completely in my own sad thoughts; then, as question after question was put to me, each one more unfeeling than the last, I realized to what they were tending—what was the impression gradually becoming general in the minds of those about me. The full horror of my situation burst upon me. I dared not raise my eyes for fear of meeting others bent upon me accusingly; to my excited fancy it seemed as though I actually heard my sentence passed behind me. Oh, if they had only fallen upon me then, killed me with their own hands, and so released me from my misery, I could have borne it; but I knew that weeks must pass before my fate would be decided, and that there was a worse ordeal in store for me when I had to stand upon my formal trial! For every eye that gazed at me with impunity then, there would be a hundred there; and for every tongue that spoke against me then, a hundred would condemn me there. How could I bear it? How could I elude it? I had had friends before, and lovers—at least, those who said they loved me—but none came to me in my sorrow. It was you, an utter stranger, who stood by me, and offered me the means of escape. Do I blame you for that? Ah, no, no! I bless you for it every day, every hour; it is only at times, in very bitterness, that I wish the end had come then!”



He was watching her intently, trying to read the truth in her wide-open tearless eyes and the painful trembling of her lips. Every day during the past eleven months the question had presented itself to him and been dismissed without a decisive reply— Was she guilty of the crime of which she had been suspected?

Lawyer though he had been for so many years, and cognizant of many phases of human life, this he could not determine. He knew enough to understand that where a woman was concerned he knew nothing. Oftentimes in his professional career he had quoted words which he had read once—he could not remember where—and which had fixed themselves in his brain—

“She is a woman, and the ways unto her  
Are like the finding of a certain path  
After deep-fallen snow.”

In this case he was quite at sea; but doubt must have predominated over the trust he was so often tempted to show, for he never asked the question, and she had never volunteered any information on the subject. Indeed this was the first time they had discussed it freely.

“I too remember that day,” he said, slowly. “I had seen you once before at the theater; you were acting Galatea. You must have received many compliments respecting your dramatic talent, so I will not add to the number. But your acting touched me as I had never been touched before, and, when you moved so sadly and silently back to the pedestal from which you had come, leaving to Cynisca the happiness of her husband’s love, something as nearly like tears as anything my eyes have ever known was in them then. There was more than that to draw me to you—a resemblance—faint, it is true, but recurring again and again with every change of voice and gesture—to some one I had known and—and loved, years—surely it must be centuries—ago! To her I had brought only sorrow. A few days after I had seen your performance I heard what had



happened. I made friends with the chief of the police, and managed to be present at the coroner's inquiry, with some vague idea of expiating my fault to her by being of use to you. Of course it was a mere chimera, an illusion; but the whole thing was romantic, I suppose, and utterly unlike what might be expected from one of my profession, which is more than usually cynical perhaps, more than usually hard. Yet I suppose we all have our weak spots somewhere; and you touched mine."

Though he paused a moment, there came no reply. The slight figure crouched at his feet was trembling, and now and then there came a sobbing sound, as though it were only by an effort she restrained her tears. Her face was hidden from him.

"It was the wildest, most unlawyer-like idea that flashed into my mind as the evidence proceeded and you did not even attempt to defend yourself. I thought even you would laugh at me as a madman, or at least distrust my good intentions when I presented myself before you and proposed that you should come with me and make use of the passage which a day before I had taken for my house-keeper. But you trusted me completely, and accepted my help without any question whatever. A few theatrical properties that happened to be in your room rendered our plans easier, and the next morning found us steaming away from Sydney, away from all the troubles that had threatened you, unsuspected and unfollowed."

"I remember," she whispered. "Oh, the relief I felt as land gradually faded out of sight! It was not till many days later that I wondered why you had interested yourself in me. I was too thankful for the result to question its cause."

"And now it scarcely appears strange to me at all," put in the old man softly. "The resemblance I spoke of seems to grow daily—or perhaps I imagine it. Your presence is a pleasure to me always. I like to watch you



flitting about the house, and to know that you are looking after me as a daughter might have done if things had been different. My one wish now is to see you happier. Can't you forget the past?"

She shuddered, and was silent.

"Believe me, there is no fear of detection. If we had been fated to be discovered, it would have happened long ago."

"Hundreds of people must have seen me at the theater," she returned, hopelessly.

"A stage make-up is the most deceptive thing in the world. I scarcely recognized you myself on that day at the inquest. Besides, you are changed—wonderfully changed—since then; and the short hair makes a difference. But to return to what I was speaking of before. Ellen, why won't you call me 'uncle'?"

She blushed painfully, and avoided his gaze.

"I would rather not," she said, timidly—"though of course I will do so if you insist."

"I do not insist," he interrupted, hastily. "But at least do not call me 'sir,' as though you were a dependent."

"I am dependent on your goodness. Do you think I am so mean-spirited as to be ashamed of it? You are so generous and kind that I have room only for gratitude in my heart—gratitude and love."

"And don't you think that repays me for anything I can do?" he asked, gently.

She took his hand in hers and kissed it, then rose to her feet and turned away shyly, half afraid that he might consider it a liberty.

"What do you think of our landlord—neighbor as he will be too, I fancy?" asked Mr. Bowyer, changing the subject abruptly.

"I think he seemed very pleasant and anxious to be kind."



“I thought him a capital fellow. There is no one after all so charming as a really thorough-bred English gentleman. I wonder if he is married?”

“Oh, no—I fancy not!”

Mr. Bowyer smiled. He had noticed Colonel Severn’s evident admiration of her, and was amused to find that, in spite of her abstraction and the indifference which had become habitual, she had apparently noticed it as well.

“I suppose dinner is nearly ready?” he observed a moment later.

“I will see,” said Ellen, going to the door.

As her fingers closed round the handle the door was opened hastily from the outside, and Mrs. Priolo faced her, with a half-apologetic, half-defiant expression, as though asserting her right to be there in such close proximity to the key-hole.

“I came to say dinner is ready when you wish for it, sir,” she said quickly.

“And I am ready for dinner,” replied the old man cheerfully, not having seen how suspiciously hurried was her entrance.

But, if his sagacity was at fault, Ellen Warde’s intelligence was quickened by fear—the nervous dread lest her secret should be discovered. She realized at once that Mrs. Priolo had been listening—her very explanation of her presence proved it, for *qui s’excuse s’accuse*. The only question was, How long had she been there—how much had she heard? After all, their conversation for the past ten minutes had been harmless enough, and the chances were against the housekeeper’s having been long away from the kitchen, where, on the first day of their occupation, there would be so much to do.

Ellen tried to reassure herself, but with little success. No argument could combat the nameless terror that had made the past eleven months so hard to bear. She feared nothing in particular, everything in general. The convic-



tion was rooted firmly in her mind that some day, by some means, she would be discovered and compelled to stand her trial for the murder of her sister.

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## CHAPTER V.

To Colonel Severn the next day seemed a very long one. It would be intruding, he felt, to call again on his new tenants so soon; and, besides, they would have plenty to do arranging things according to their taste. He wondered how the sitting-room would look when he saw it again—whether it would be stamped with the unmistakable signs of a woman's presence, and whether, from its appearance, he would be able to guess anything of that especial woman's individuality. That she was clever he was convinced, though as yet she had given no proof of mental power; and feminine, of course—that he could not doubt. She was so gentle, so graceful in every movement, and her voice—it was like music. He had never heard anything so exquisitely tuneful and sweet.

That morning he sent over a large basket of hot-house flowers and fruit, and received a short note of thanks from Mr. Bowyer himself, to whom they had been addressed, a new feeling of shyness, utterly foreign to his nature, having prevented him from offering them direct to her for whom they were in reality intended. Then in the afternoon he walked in the direction of the Dower House, though not exactly past its gates, hoping to meet one of its occupants.

Strangely enough, he did not at once guess to what all these symptoms tended. He was too unversed in the arts of love to know that he was coming—indeed had already come—under the influence of the mischievous little god. In his own mind he accounted for the interest that he took in the new arrivals by the fact that lately he had led a very lonely existence—and solitude must pall at last upon



the most unsociably inclined. When Charlie came, it would be different, he told himself again. The Abbey would become a home, and he would be independent of his neighbors.

Twelve o'clock was the earliest hour at which he could go over on the following morning, he had decided, although this was not to be a formal call, but merely a renewed offer of help; and exactly at the stroke of the clock he started off.

He walked quickly, but the way seemed so long that he branched off into a short cut that led through the park across a small ditch into the Dower House garden. Passing over the soft grass, his footsteps fell almost noiselessly; and, as he came to where the trees were thickest, he heard a low sobbing sound, and stopped to discover what it was. Moving a few steps further on, he saw that it was the girl who had been so constantly in his thoughts since he made her acquaintance only two days before—Mr. Bowyer's niece, with the sad smile and sweet voice. She was standing with her face buried in her hands, weeping as though her heart would break, while every violent sob seemed to shake her slight figure so that it was pitiful to witness. So at least George Severn found it.

He stood there for a moment hesitating what to do, trembling with excitement, the wish to help and comfort her struggling with the knowledge that any such desire was futile. How could he, a mere stranger, win her confidence or seek to calm her? With a heart full of sympathy, he could do nothing to console—indeed his very presence there was an intrusion on her grief which she would resent if by any chance she saw him.

At the mere thought of so drawing her displeasure down upon himself he turned hastily and walked away in the direction whence he had come. When he reached his destination—going the longer way by the road, and with slower steps, now that the inducement which had caused



him to hasten them was gone—he received a cordial welcome from Mr. Bowyer, who had also felt the long quiet day in the country drag after the more stirring life to which he had been accustomed.

For nearly an hour they talked together, finding many subjects in common; then a light step was heard outside, and Ellen Warde entered the room.

She bowed and smiled in answer to Colonel Severn's somewhat confused greeting. Not a trace was on her face of the strong emotion which she had successfully overcome. It was Colonel Severn who was ill at ease and bewildered.

Mr. Bowyer began to talk about a sketch which Ellen was to make that afternoon, and to discuss the point from which it should be taken, so their visitor had leisure to recover himself and look round.

The room was altered, yet less so than he expected. Nothing new had been put into it—none of the little favorite knickknacks which women carry about with them to give even the bare-looking rooms of a hotel a semblance of home. They had brought absolutely nothing with them except an easel, on which was a painting, evidently just completed, being scarcely dry. But there was a subtle change, more to be felt than defined!

A few chairs that had stood with their backs to the wall were drawn forward, small tables were placed more with a view to being of use, flowers were everywhere, filling every available vase and bowl, while lying on an ottoman was something white with a needle sticking in it, a reel of cotton and a thimble by its side.

These things he noted in one swift glance; then he turned and joined in the conversation.

“You are quite an artist, Miss Warde. I have no prettier picture on my walls than that upon your easel now, though some are by famous men. The river sparkling in the sun, as it winds its way through an orange-grove, is



charming; and the girl bathing her feet is a picture in herself, with her bright clothes and basket of flowers laid beside her. 'Summer in Italy'—the mere thought of it is a pleasure."

The girl looked pleased at his appreciation.

"I am so glad you think it pretty! It was only a sketch at first, but Mr. Bowyer liked it, so I filled it in and made a picture of it. I am very fond of painting. It absorbs one so—" She stopped abruptly: "And makes one forget for awhile," she had been about to add; then, suddenly remembering that she was talking to an utter stranger, "'Summer in Italy'—that is a pretty name for it," she added, quickly.

Colonel Severn stayed to luncheon with them, but left almost immediately afterward. He had business letters to write, and shut himself up in his study to finish them directly he reached home. But he found his thoughts wandering very often, and a face coming between him and the paper scattered all his ideas. It was always the same face, yet in different moods. Ellen Warde smiling, Ellen Warde in tears, or inscrutable as a sphinx, with far-seeing absent eyes and parted speechless lips.

What was the fascination she possessed for him—for him who had never cared for any woman before, nor ever troubled to find the why and wherefore of woman's changing moods? He could not tell; but he realized with some excitement and a little fear that the attraction she exercised was growing stronger every hour, and that, if he meant to combat it, he must do so at once, before it mastered him.

Should he go away? Charlie was not to join him for another week, but he could meet him somewhere; and the boy would probably not object to a month in Paris instead of being buried in the country.

Two or three hours had been spent in doubt and hesitation, and only half his letters were written, when a cheerful voice was heard outside—some one calling out to know



where the colonel was; and the next moment the door was thrown open, and Charlie, travel-stained but radiant, stood before him.

"I am here before you expected me, sir," he explained, after a cordial hand-shake. "The fact is, I grew tired of old Brown's prosing—he'd be a good fellow enough if he'd only remember he's not always in the pulpit; and then I wanted to see what the new inheritance was like."

"You've not come before you are welcome, my boy," answered the colonel, warmly. "This big rambling place is dreary enough to inhabit all alone. I have been wanting you badly."

"And I hope you will want to keep me now that you have me, sir."

As he spoke he took a chair near the fire. The colonel looked down at him, smiling.

"I expect that you will get so sick of the dullness of Littlehaven that you will be glad enough to get away, even to work—and Mr. Brown."

"No fear of that! I met the loveliest girl I ever saw as I came up from the station. You know, of course, there was nothing to meet me there; so I borrowed a pony from the station-master. Such an old crock—I thought I shouldn't get here before dark! Well, the reins were over his neck, and I was 'hurrooshing' him along, when we came round a corner sharply; and the pony saw something that made him stop dead and sent me nearly over his head. When I recovered, I saw that it was a girl sketching at an easel; and an old man who was with her began to laugh like anything—and so did she. So did I; for I thought it best to join in the joke, though it was against myself. I know I must have been a queer figure to look at, with my arms flying round like the sails of a windmill, flourishing my hat and stick—for I did not like actually to hit the poor old beast; and then my legs were nearly touching the ground—it was such a little beggar!" He laughed



again at the remembrance. "I don't regret it either, by Jove, for it gave me an excuse to stop and speak to those people! The man—thin, tall, and with white hair—looks like an American, and the girl—she was lovely—simply lovely!" he concluded, softly.

"They are my tenants—they occupy the Dower House," said his father, soberly.

"Oh, that is charming! Then you will take me there to-morrow, and introduce me properly. I want to see her again, and remove the ridiculous impression I must have made. How she did laugh, and showed such pretty teeth! And then what eyes! Father, did you ever see such eyes?"

Colonel Severn smiled faintly, possibly in mute deprecation of the boy's raptures. He was busy putting up his papers apparently, but in reality was merely shuffling them backward and forward aimlessly. Ellen amused, and laughing merrily, like any other happy, careless girl! Many as the moods were, in which he had pictured her, even in fancy he had never seen her so, and he felt a sharp pang that his son should have so soon gained the advantage. He had seen her only for a few minutes, and already the ice was broken between them.

Charlie rattled on in an easy unembarrassed manner about his experiences abroad, his journey down, and a dozen other matters, but he returned again and again to that afternoon's adventure and its heroine. His father watched him furtively as he talked.

He was a good-looking young fellow, tall and broad-shouldered, with fair curling hair, and an incipient fair mustache that as yet failed to conceal a rather large mouth. His eyes were bright blue, and gave a winning softness of expression to his square-jawed face. But in his manner lay his great charm—the happy audacity with which he always took it for granted that he was welcome, his ready sympathy and unvarying brightness. He was a little facile perhaps, but so good-hearted withal, so true,



save in the inevitable inconstancies of youth, that all who knew him loved him, and forgave in him what in others they might have condemned.

Severn felt old and prosy in the presence of his son's youth and exuberant spirits. It seemed to him that the madness of the past two days was a thing to be ashamed of and to be jealously hidden away. He knew now what had grown up so suddenly in his heart and rendered him a puzzle to himself. He knew that he loved or was learning to love Ellen Warde; but fortunately he was warned in time, and it was not too late to stifle the passion the folly of which was so clear to him now. What chance had he with his gray hairs and spent life against Charlie's handsome face and winning ways? But, even had he more in his favor, the situation was untenable in its indignity. It was impossible, utterly impossible, that he could stoop to rivalry with his son.

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## CHAPTER VI.

COLONEL SEVERN was allowed no rest the next day until he had consented to go with his son to the Dower House. He would gladly have sent Charlie alone, but to this the boy objected so strenuously that to have continued his refusal would have aroused suspicion; and that must never be. No one must ever guess how near he had been to making a fool of himself for the sake of a sweet sad mouth and a pair of enigmatical gray eyes—at his age too, when he had thought himself impervious—and indeed ought to have been so, and would have been if he had met her in ordinary circumstances in society.

The idea of taking to himself a second wife had never seriously entered his head; but the thought had sometimes crossed his mind that if Charlie married his old age would be a lonely one, and it might be that some day a woman past her first youth, whose illusions were over, and who



would require from him neither enthusiasm nor love, might be induced from the same motives that influenced him to share his lot. To attempt to link a young girl's fate with his would be wrong as well as undesirable he had thought, for it was impossible that Spring should mate with Autumn, and it was easy to imagine that the natural incongruities of taste would cause intense suffering and disappointment.

But Ellen Warde was not like other young women. She was so sad and staid that, even if he had paused to analyze his feelings, he would scarcely have thought of her youth as an objection. That had been his mistake. He had forgotten the elasticity of spirits natural at her age, and had fancied she would always be as she was then; he had not even tried to cheer her—he had only attempted to sympathize. Ah, yes, that had been his mistake, which he realized more keenly still as she came forward to meet his son with a frank smile of welcome and outstretched hand! For a moment too the small white fingers were abandoned to his clasp, but this was only because it would be invidious to make distinctions, and she had known him first. So at least he thought, and at the earliest opportunity left her side and opened a conversation with Mr. Bowyer.

He spoke connectedly and with his usual clear judgment, but quite mechanically, for his whole attention was concentrated on the other two, who were seated on an ottoman turning over the leaves of an album. Charlie was in high spirits; once or twice he laughed heartily; and presently, unable to resist the infection of his merriment, Ellen laughed too.

The colonel started as though hurt, and Mr. Bowyer looked up in surprise.

"The young people get on well together," he observed. "It is only natural, I suppose. What is it the poet says about 'youth and crabbed age'?"



Colonel Severn could not remember the quotation, but agreed with Mr. Bowyer that it was only to be expected that Miss Warde would like to talk to some one of her own age.

“She has had no cheerful companionship of late,” said Mr. Bowyer. “I am glad your son has come.”

The other winced, but made no reply. He was relieved when Mr. Bowyer went back to the subject that they had been discussing before—a subject on which fortunately the new tenant was very eloquent, and so did not notice how sparse and brief were the replies that he received.

Colonel Severn was thinking of a fairy-story he had once heard or read and only faintly remembered. It was something about a princess who was very sad—so sad that nothing could amuse her or arouse her from her grief, though all means were tried; and at last her royal father, despairing, issued a proclamation that whoever could make the princess laugh should have her for his wife. How the story had ended he could not recollect, but he knew that as the king had proclaimed so it was—that he who won the sad princess to merriment at last became her husband.

Those old stories held so much of truth. And what more likely than that she should be grateful to any one who could cause her even for a moment to forget her trouble? And was not gratitude, like pity, akin to love?

He glanced wistfully across the room to where his son sat, leaning forward, bright with animation and gesticulating slightly—in affectation of the foreign fashion—as he talked. Ellen’s gray eyes were raised to his face in evident interest, and the color came and went in her excitement; it was as though life had been suddenly breathed into a statue, so different was she from her usual self.

Charlie, who had seen her only so, admired her without reserve, betraying his admiration at every turn. Colonel Severn got up to go, feeling that he could bear it no longer.

He was a little surprised when Ellen proposed to Mr.



Bowyer that they should walk part of the way back with them—more so when she pointedly showed her intention of walking with him, and not with his son.

Charlie's disappointment was visible, but he rallied almost immediately, and made himself as agreeable as possible to the Anglo-Australian, who had once been in the profession which he himself was ultimately to adopt. He half forgot his chagrin in listening to the old man's racy stories of cases that he had conducted in the country that he knew so much better than his own.

The other two gradually dropped behind, talking generalities at first, until Ellen Warde stopped suddenly and faced her companion.

"I want you to help me, Colonel Severn."

"If I can do so, you may be quite sure I will."

He was looking down into her troubled face with almost fatherly concern. Half the remaining years of his life would he gladly give if by doing so he could purchase for her happiness and peace.

"Miss Mary Featherstone, the vicar's daughter, called on me to-day."

"I am glad of that—she is such a nice girl, and will be a pleasant friend for you."

Ellen grew as pale as death, and pressed one hand to her heart, as though the pain she felt were actually physical.

"That is quite impossible," came at last in a low strained voice from between her white lips. "I can never be her friend. I am in mourning, you know; I do not visit."

"But the vicar's daughter—surely—"

"It makes no difference. I—I don't wish to break through my rule." Meeting his glance of amazement, she added, hastily, "It is for that I want your assistance. You know her well, and can explain to her that I am very grateful to her for her kindness in coming to see me so



soon; but—but I never make friends. We are neither of us sociable. In your case it was different; but, if I returned Miss Featherstone's call, others might come; and—and—"

"Thank you very much for making an exception in our favor"—gravely.

"You must not thank me; it was because Mr. Bowyer likes some one to talk to," she began; then, conscious of the ungratefulness of her remark, she added, with a winning smile, "You were a stranger then; now I too am glad you did not remain so."

Severn bowed somewhat formally. In his own mind he decided that she was glad on Charlie's account, not on his own.

"And so," she went on, hurriedly, "I want you to say all this to Miss Featherstone without offending her or arousing her suspicion. I mean"—walking on quickly to cover her confusion—"I should not like her to think that there was any reason for our strict seclusion."

"Your recent loss will be sufficient excuse. She is the last in the world to think evil of any or to wish to force her confidence. By and by, when the first violence of your grief is past, she may hope to make your acquaintance, even if you will not accord her your friendship."

She turned away her head and bit her lip. Would he never understand? Must she tell him in plain words that she was so circumstanced that she dared not make a friend—that the terrible past held her in its toils and must influence her future?

"It is not a recent loss—it happened nearly a year ago; and nothing can alter my resolution. I can never make a friend, nor even an acquaintance!" she broke out, petulantly at last.

"Not a recent loss? Then it must have been some one very dear—" He stopped, awed by the pain and passion in the eyes that for a moment met his own and seemed to



beg his silence. "Forgive me!" he said, humbly, and dared say no more.

For a moment or two she could not answer; all her strength was required to master the emotion that his words had caused. Then she said, slowly—

"I will leave it to you to say what you think best, only let it be definite. And now will you go on and join the others? Tell Mr. Bowyer that I am tired. I dare say he will overtake me."

She gave him her hand in farewell, and he held it reverently, looking at her earnestly, as though wishful that his eyes could say all that his tongue failed aptly to express.

"I will always do what I can do for you," he said, abruptly, then turned and, walking away rapidly, left her standing there.

It was growing dusk, but she scarcely noticed the lengthening shadows and the cold night breeze that had sprung up, so deep was she in thought. What had she said? Had she betrayed herself? What conclusion could he draw from her strange agitation and the expression of her wish to live her life alone?

A bat flew by so near that it almost touched her hair, and elicited a faint cry from her. Her reverie effectually broken, she roused herself and went back to the house.

There were lights in all the rooms, and as she approached a shadow moved across the blind of her window. The gate she held escaped from her grasp, and swung to with a creaking sound. The figure immediately disappeared. When she reached her room, no one was there.

Had it been her imagination, which saw a cause for fear at every turn, or only the servant lighting the candles? It was stupid of her to be so easily alarmed; would she ever be able to possess her soul in peace?

On this occasion her fears had not been without foundation.



Directly she and Mr. Bowyer had left the house, Mrs. Priolo, who had been watching for this opportunity, slipped upstairs, having told the maid that she would do her work for her that evening. This was soon finished, and then she was at leisure to prosecute her search.

She did not hope much from it—the girl would scarcely keep anything knowingly in her possession which could prove anything against her; but, if she could only obtain a clew, it would be easy to follow it up.

Her doubt of Ellen Warde had been verified on that first night of their arrival, when she listened at the door, and had caught something of what was said as the voices rose and fell. She had heard nothing clearly, only enough to tell her that this girl who had supplanted her had escaped by flight from the consequences of some crime, and was now in hiding.

If she could only discover whence she came, where Mr. Bowyer had met her, and why he had taken her under his protection! Drawer after drawer was carefully examined; but nothing rewarded her exertions. Once she thought she was on the threshold of a discovery. She had come upon a round tin box with a patent padlock on it; and her quick sight instantly detected that, though apparently so securely fastened, the pin of the hinge being loose, the box could in reality be opened with ease. To remove the pin was the work of a moment; but the housekeeper uttered an ejaculation of disgust as she saw its contents. It was nothing but a dried bouquet, with the lace and pale blue ribbons still around it.

“Such nonsense!” muttered the woman, angrily, as she dropped it back into its proper place.

She was destined, however, to gather something from her stolen visit.

A large portfolio stood upright against the wall. It was locked, and she felt no hope of being able to find out anything from it; but as she lifted it she saw a paper project-



ing a little way beyond the leather, and as she shook it vigorously several others fluttered down. She picked them up eagerly. The first she looked at was a photograph of Ellen Warde herself as Galatea—Mrs. Priolo was not sufficiently well-educated to recognize the Greek dress; but another photograph, in which she was portrayed as Rosalind, in doublet and hose, dispelled all doubt. The girl was nothing but a play-actress, decided the housekeeper with a thrill of horror, forgetful of those old days when she herself had not been a very respectable bar-maid in Montreal.

But after all, though play-acting was disreputable enough to drive away her two fine gentleman admirers if discovered, it was not a crime. More remained to be unearthed.

Another photograph—Elaine and Ada together, their arms interlaced, the two golden heads touching. The resemblance was so striking that Mrs. Priolo comprehended the relationship at once. There had been a sister; where was she now? Was it for her that Ellen wore that ridiculous deep mourning, for all the world like a widow—much deeper, in fact, than Mrs. Priolo had worn when her first husband died. The housekeeper scented a mystery here, but had not time then to follow it up.

Several sketches remained to be seen—bits of scenery that were contemptuously put aside and designated as “daubs;” then a head, only roughly outlined, of a young man of about twenty-five, with dark eyes set rather near together, a well-shaped nose, dark close-cropped hair, and a small pointed mustache. Who was this?

But the next, the last of the sketches, brought a glow of satisfaction into Mrs. Priolo’s thin face. It was a view of Sydney—she would have recognized it even had the name not been written beneath, and the date, March 9th.

Why, it was the very year and month when she herself was at Sydney! No—it was April when she arrived there,



and when she had been so strangely deserted by her employer.

Ah, now she was on the scent—now she had the clew! Ellen Warde and Mr. Bowyer had probably left Sydney together—why?

The creaking of the gate disturbed her. Hastily slipping the sketches back, she placed the portfolio in its old position, and was safe in her room before Ellen Warde had mounted the stairs.

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## CHAPTER VII.

MR. BOWYER'S native air was apparently not agreeing with him. Whatever the cause, whether it was the dampness, after the clear, dry climate of Australia, or the season of the year, which was trying to every one, he became nervous and irritable, and altogether out of health without any ailment in particular. The doctor who was called in at Ellen's repeated request pronounced it general debility—a breaking up of the system; but Mr. Bowyer himself said that it was "liver."

Nothing else, he thought, could account for the gloomy fancies which possessed him—fancies he was ashamed to put into words even to himself, and which gained in gloominess from their very repression. Whence they had arisen he could not tell, but he felt vaguely that they grew and became more unbearable after every conversation with his housekeeper; and these conversations had been very frequent of late.

Charlie Severn was in and out of the house all day, with boyish disregard of what his visits might be taken to mean—indeed really anxious that their motive should be understood. He was desperately in love with Ellen Warde, and his passion was apparent to every one except her whom it most concerned. She, absorbed in her own affairs, thought



of him only as a pleasant companion, one who possessed the happy knack of making her forget her troubles, if only for a time. She liked him, was fond of him indeed after a fashion; but, though he amused and interested her, she had never dreamed of him as a lover. He was a year younger than herself, and more than usually young in manner for his age; so she enjoyed his society without any misgiving, went wandering with him through the neighboring woods, or walking sometimes along the dusty roads that led to Greathaven, and sketched with him, never dreaming what all this meant to the young man. Nor did she imagine that there was danger in leaving her benefactor so often alone. He had more than once expressed himself pleased that she should have a younger companion than himself, and she had believed what he said, and never noticed how day by day Mrs. Priolo was taking her place and undermining the old man's faith in her.

Mr. Bowyer himself never knew how it began—how the first doubt arose in his mind whether he had done well in allowing impulse to triumph over common sense; but gradually the feeling grew that he had been rash to burden himself with a girl of whom he knew absolutely nothing, and actually unwise to trust her as he had done.

He was decidedly unwell, nervous and unstrung, and particularly susceptible to outside influence. If Ellen had devoted herself to him now as she had done before, she might have entirely won his confidence and never lost it again; but the neglect that began in carelessness became an estrangement through her pride; for, as Mrs. Priolo usurped her rights one by one, instead of fighting, she renounced them quietly. If he wanted her, surely he would tell her so; and in the meantime she could not stoop to beg that she might be reinstated. She forgot to make allowances for his broken health. Once or twice, when she came back in the evening from a ramble, she saw through the window, as she passed, Mr. Bowyer seated by the fire and the house-



keeper reading aloud, or else talking earnestly, while the old man paced the room in evident indecision.

She was too proud to interrupt them, seeing that they got on so well alone; and it never entered her head that these conversations concerned her. Nor indeed was her name ever mentioned. Mrs. Priolo was too clever to commit an indiscretion. If the old lawyer once suspected that she disliked Ellen, and was trying to vilify her for her own ends, her game would be at an end. He would be on his guard, and distrust whatever she might presently have occasion to bring against his protégée.

No; whatever she said was general, and seemed to apply to no one in particular. It was of course a mere coincidence that the talk so often turned upon people who had been raised from the mire and had been the undoing of those who had so raised them.

If she ever spoke of Ellen, it was affectionately and pitifully; but even then she managed to implant a sting. It had been dull for the poor child—no wonder she took the first opportunity to make a new acquaintance! For her part, she could never desert old friends for new; but then it was absurd to expect to find old heads on young shoulders. She was sure—quite sure Miss Ellen did not mean to be ungrateful.

To this the old man returned rather gruffly that he needed no gratitude, and was glad the girl should enjoy herself.

“That is because you are so good, sir—too good for this wicked world, where there’s always some one looking out to impose on the charitably inclined.”

“I don’t think”—testily—“I’m such a fool that any one would attempt to impose on me.”

Mrs. Priolo eagerly disclaimed any such insinuation. But, though compelled to abandon the attack then, she returned to it again and again, so that at last Mr. Bowyer began really to believe that he was badly treated by his adopted niece. Then he would speak to her coldly; and



Ellen would creep away to her room and weep there silently over the change in him. Had he repented of his kindness to her? If so, she could no longer accept it so simply and unquestioningly as she had done before. Unless he really liked her and cared to have her with him, she was a dependent indeed, not even earning the bread she eat.

Another circumstance distressed her. Colonel Severn had never been to the Dower House since that day on which she had asked for his aid. Had she in any way fallen in his estimation? Did he suspect anything, or was it simply disinclination? That he had had no quarrel with Mr. Bowyer was evident, for the lawyer had been over to the Abbey several times at the colonel's invitation. It must be some reason connected with herself that kept him away. It seemed she was a stumbling-block all round! Only Charlie Severn seemed to take any pleasure in her society now; so no wonder she greeted him so cordially, and that such sweet regret shone from her eyes when she said good-bye.

But, self-engrossed as she was, she had not been utterly blind to Mrs. Priolo's machinations. She could not fail to see that that lady was maneuvering to keep her away from Mr. Bowyer, though she did not at once realize that she had any other motive than a perhaps natural jealousy. At last she resolved to act boldly and remonstrate with her. If that had no effect, she would appeal to Mr. Bowyer, and ask if it was by his wish that they were never together now—never alone as they used to be. Once she had sat down to the piano to play to him, but Mrs. Priolo had kept up a flow of conversation the whole time, so that at last he had begged Ellen somewhat impatiently to desist, as his nerves were not strong enough to stand any music now. Whether it would not have soothed him if he had been allowed to listen quietly he never stopped to think; and Ellen had no opportunity of trying, for the housekeeper scarcely ever left his side.

At last Ellen managed to intercept her on the stairs.



“Mrs. Priolo,” she said, in her sweet low-toned voice, that took away from her speech anything it might have had of abruptness, “why do you try to come between Mr. Bowyer and me?”

“I? Why, I don’t understand! Why should I do such a thing?”

“Yes, why?” repeated Ellen, firmly.

The woman, recovering herself, laughed; but the laugh contained more malignity than mirth.

“It’s some nonsense of yours, Miss Ellen. You were always given to dreaming.”

“But I am not dreaming now. I can see plainly that you are taking advantage of Mr. Bowyer’s illness to usurp my place.”

“And, if I am”—fiercely—“who usurped mine? I had served him for more than nine years, and he was always satisfied with me and wanted no one else until you came, with your sly ways, pretending butter would not melt in your mouth, and scheming after his money all the while!”

“I scheme after his money!” cried Ellen, scornfully. “You may have every farthing he possesses if you will only leave me in peace and let him like me as much as he used to do.”

Mrs. Priolo smiled a slow, comprehensive smile full of unbelief.

“Can’t you trust me?”—impatiently.

“I’d sooner make things certain for myself, thank you, Miss Ellen.”

“Then I shall go at once to Mr. Bowyer and tell him what has passed between us. I shall beg him to leave me nothing. I shall tell him—what he at least will be large-minded enough to believe—that I want only his affection, not his money.”

Her decided attitude and evident determination to carry out her threat made the housekeeper grow red, then pale, with apprehension. She would never have shown her hand



so recklessly had she thought Ellen would dare to resist her will.

“I don’t see what good that would do to either of us—and he so ill too,” she remarked, hastily.

“Then promise me you will do as I wish,” insisted Ellen. “Let us be together alone in the morning and evening as we used to be. If you want to attack, let me at least defend myself.”

“Indeed, miss, I don’t want to do you any harm; and I hope you’ll not harm me. I have the best right to his money, you’ll admit, having been with him so long and been married to his only brother—why, I’m the only connection he has in the world!”

“I told you”—haughtily—“that I had no wish for his money.”

She was turning away, resolved to keep the advantage she had obtained, when the housekeeper made a last effort to regain what she had lost by her indiscretion.

“I am almost his sister, Miss Ellen, you see.” Then, abandoning the cringing manner she had adopted, and leaning forward, so that she might see if her random shot would tell, she added, meaningly, “Had you ever a sister?”

But she was not prepared for so immediate or so decisive a result. Ellen Warde fell back against the balusters, breathing heavily, as though her heart were affected by some sudden shock. With widely opened eyes she stared blankly at the speaker, her lips as white as chalk.

She was evidently in deadly fear, and Mrs. Priolo was careful to say nothing to reassure her.

“You leave me alone, and I’ll leave you alone,” she observed; and, nodding her head triumphantly, she went toward the room where Mr. Bowyer was seated, feeling that she had won the game with points to spare.



## CHAPTER VIII.

Two or three months had passed since Colonel Severn last visited the Dower House; nor had he seen Ellen in the interval. Charlie had always asked for his company at first, and expressed himself injured at the somewhat curt refusals he received; but latterly he had evidently preferred going thither alone. One day, as he was starting off as usual, his father stopped him in the hall.

“Come into my den a moment, Charlie—I want to speak to you,” he said.

The young fellow went with him at once, and sat on the edge of the table, waiting for what was to follow. He had a clear conscience, or he might have been disturbed by this unexpected summons. As it was, his bright blue eyes rested unflinchingly upon his father’s face. The few unimportant debts he had contracted at Harrow had been settled on his father’s accession to the property, and the handsome allowance he now drew amply covered his present expenses. Nor was there anything else he was afraid might come to light. All his boyish faults and peccadilloes he had already frankly confessed. Father and son were more like brothers now that the close intercourse of the past few weeks had effectually broken down the barrier which had been the result of their long separation, and had not been the effect of any want of sympathy.

“You are off to the Dower House, I suppose?” inquired the colonel.

“Yes, sir,” answered Charlie, with his usual frankness.

“Can I take any message?”

“Have you ever thought, Charlie, to what these daily visits may commit you?” counter-questioned Colonel Severn, gravely, going directly to the point.

He did not glance at his son to see the effect of his



words; all his attention was apparently fixed on the cutting off of the end of a cigar. He pared it carefully until it was exactly even, and then, when no reply was forthcoming, he lighted it slowly and went on—

“It is not fair to Miss Warde, making her conspicuous by your attentions, unless you really mean to ask her to be your wife—”

“And, if I did, sir, should I have your approval?” interrupted the boy, eagerly.

Colonel Severn blew cloud after cloud of pale-blue smoke into the air before he answered.

“You see, Charlie,” he said, half apologetically, “I’m not a model parent. Perhaps it is because I am young enough still to understand that one would like to follow one’s own way in a matter of this sort; but, at any rate, I don’t think it is carelessness as to your welfare that prompts me to let you choose for yourself. The reason why I spoke to you this morning is that I want you to be certain of your own mind—your own wishes. You are very young, and you may change.”

“Never!” cried Charlie, with such superabundance of emphasis in his tones that even his father, whose mood was serious enough, was forced to smile.

“You must also remember,” he went on, presently, “that we know nothing of the antecedents of either Mr. Bowyer himself or his niece. No, no; I am insinuating nothing”—as Charlie threw back his head in angry impatience; “but they have evidently some strong reason for the strict seclusion they insist on; and you must ask yourself whether, in case anything transpired to—to Miss Warde’s disadvantage, your love is strong enough to stand the shock.”

“If she is in trouble, there is the more reason why she should have some one to help and protect her,” answered Charlie, simply.



The colonel laid his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder in mute approval.

"Then you do not object to my asking her to become my wife, sir?"

"My dear boy, I have told you before that in my opinion fathers should have no authority in the matter of a son's marriage."

"And you won't even give your opinion? At least you might offer your advice," grumbled Charlie, who had expected some opposition, and felt unreasonably disappointed that he had no battles to fight for his love's sweet sake.

"What would my advice be worth? It is your affair entirely—it is you who have to live with her, not I," he concluded, with a short laugh.

Charlie looked at him in half-offended surprise. Something must have vexed his father, for he was utterly unlike what he usually was, calm and unruffled, yet full of sympathy and instinctive tact.

"It strikes me," said the young fellow, after a pause, "that we have been taking rather a one-sided view of the question. Suppose"—with a sudden catch in his voice—"suppose she won't have me?"

The colonel remained silent. In his own mind he scarcely felt a doubt, for what woman could resist the boy's winning face and sunny nature? Yet, much as he loved his son and wished for his happiness—ay, even above his own—he could not, even to comfort him, express his conviction that Ellen Warde would become his wife. In time he might accustom himself to the idea; but just now the pain was new and desperately hard to bear.

"It seems such presumption in me to ask for her love," went on Charlie, dolefully; "she is so beautiful, so clever, and I—"

"Do you think one stops to weigh the pros and cons in love?"

But Charlie's fears once aroused, would not be so easily



allayed. Nothing would satisfy him but that his father should accompany him and give his opinion as to whether the case were hopeless or not; and Colonel Severn, who had never refused him anything on which he had seriously set his heart, reluctantly consented.

“Not that I shall be of the least use,” he observed, resignedly, as they approached the gate of the Dower House. “I’m an old foggy now, and have forgotten all the signs and symptoms.”

“You old? Why, you are in the prime of life! It is I who am so insufferably, disgustingly young. Do you think any woman would look at me when you were by? I say, dad”—linking his arm affectionately through his father’s—“isn’t it lucky you did not fall in love with her?”

The necessity for any reply was obviated by Ellen’s coming forward to meet them as they passed through the gate. She had been gathering roses—a basket full of them hung upon her arm—but not one of them could vie with the crimson that came into her cheeks as she recognized her visitors.

Charlie stole a shy questioning glance at his father. Surely her confusion was a good sign!

“I am glad you have come again at last,” said Ellen, giving her hand to the colonel; “and Mr. Bowyer will be very glad to see you too, I know.”

She stood with downcast eyes, nervously fingering her flowers, as he quietly spoke his excuses for his past neglect of them and expressed his pleasure at being there then.

When he had finished speaking, Ellen could think of nothing to say in turn. Charlie broke in impulsively with some question about herself, and, as she answered him, Colonel Severn walked on to join Mr. Bowyer, who was sitting outside the house.

“You are better, I hope?” he said, civilly, when the old lawyer had shaken hands with him and reproached him for his long absence.



“ Well, yes, perhaps I am. You know there is nothing radically wrong—it is merely nervous weakness; and, upon my soul, I’d rather have the most deadly disease that science ever combated.”

“ I can well understand that. We men are not accustomed even to acknowledge that we have nerves.”

“ I suppose it is change of climate. I was never like this in Australia.”

“ What does Doctor Armstrong recommend?”

Mr. Bowyer shrugged his shoulders a little scornfully.

“ The usual things, of course—nourishing diet, cheerful society, and gentle exercise.”

Mrs. Priolo came from the house with a small tray on which were a bottle and wine-glass.

“ It is time for your medicine, sir,” she said, respectfully, and poured it out.

He swallowed it obediently.

“ The gallons of it I have taken!” he said, making a wry face, as the housekeeper resettled his cushions and pushed his footstool nearer.

“ Indeed, sir, so you have; it’s to be hoped it’ll do you good soon,” she said, sympathetically.

Colonel Severn scanned her curiously. He did not like the woman’s voice—it sounded false to his keen ears, which had always been quick to discover Asiatic double-dealing; nor did the expression of her face please him. It was too thin and hard; and the smile she had summoned up seemed unnatural and forced.

“ I’d stake my life upon it the woman is deceitful!” thought the colonel to himself, as he watched her re-enter the house.

Then Mr. Bowyer spoke again.

“ Yes, I suppose it is the change of climate. My niece has also been unwell. She comes down in the morning looking as though she had not slept all night, and eats simply nothing at all. I can’t think what it is.”



“Perhaps,” began Severn, and then suddenly stopped. He had been about to say, “Perhaps she is unhappy,” but it struck him that the remark might savor of impertinence, and on the spur of the moment he could think of nothing to say instead.

“I know what you were going to say,” finished Mr. Bowyer, quickly, the idea striking him now for the first time. “Perhaps she is in love.”

Colonel Severn was silent; nor did Mr. Bowyer speak again at once. This was indeed an easy solution of the difficulty which had been troubling him of late. Why had it never entered his head before? The housekeeper’s hints had had their intended effect. He had grown uneasy, actually afraid, at Ellen Warde’s continued residence under his roof; and yet he could not find it in his heart to take from her the only shelter she possessed. He could not turn her out; but, if some one else should offer to take her—some one who knew nothing of the past, and therefore need never be troubled by it—ah, that would be a happy deliverance indeed, and his conscience could be at rest about her! It never struck him that it would be dishonorable to allow any one to marry her in ignorance of the past. Just then he was thinking of himself—wholly of himself—and the cowardly fear that countless warnings, more implied than spoken, had implanted in his thoughts.

Ellen was moving slowly from bush to bush, her soft black velvet gown trailing over the short grass, the afternoon sun shining upon her uncovered head; her hair, so closely cut when she arrived, had grown a little longer now, and lay in soft golden rings upon her forehead. It was almost the only color about her, for her face was very pale, seen now in repose, and she seemed languid and uninterested, though her companion was talking so eagerly and so near her that once the two fair heads touched as simultaneously they stooped to gather a rose that hung lower than the rest.



“Would you approve if anything came of that?” asked Mr. Bowyer, eagerly. “She is a good girl—a really good girl; and”—as the other did not answer—“she will have twenty thousand pounds either on her wedding-day or at my death.”

“She is fair enough and sweet enough to be welcome for her own sake,” said Severn.

“Still,” smiled Mr. Bowyer, “money never comes amiss.”

The colonel pushed back his chair impatiently. He was angry that Ellen should be thus offered to his son, with money added as an inducement for him to take her. Yet the old man had not seemed wanting in pride or affection for her before. What had happened to bring about the change?

“Charlie would be glad to marry her without a penny,” he said, curtly.

A slight sound attracted his attention, coming apparently from the open window behind them. Looking up, he saw a white malicious face peering out from behind the curtains, almost unrecognizable with rage, yet he knew it could belong to no other than the woman who a few moments before had smiled upon them both so blandly.

She must have overheard Mr. Bowyer’s expressed intention of giving so large a sum to his niece, and it was that which had infuriated her so. Had she had any reason to expect his fortune herself?

The face had been withdrawn at once; it was only for an instant that Colonel Severn had seen it; yet he could not forget its diabolical expression, and felt alarmed for Ellen’s sake.

Would any harm come to her? Not if he could avert it. They must hurry on this marriage—if it was to be, it might as well be soon—and Ellen must be warned. Would it be of any use to speak to Mr. Bowyer?

He had risen to his feet in his excitement, and Mr.



Bowyer rose too, proposing they should walk, as the air was growing chilly.

“Have you had that housekeeper of yours long?” asked Colonel Severn, abruptly.

“Why, yes!”—with a look of surprise. “She has been with me some nine or ten years.”

“Ah, then, she is quite a treasure, I suppose?” went on the colonel, carelessly twisting his long dark mustache.

“She suits me very well—indeed has been my right hand since I have been ill. She is a sort of connection.”

No more was said. It would be useless, Colonel Severn felt; for on no subject were people as a rule so touchy as on that of old and valued servants; and his acquaintance with his tenant was so slight.

“Well, sir,” said Charlie, eagerly, as they walked home together half an hour later—“well, what do you think?”

“I think,” answered his father, impressively, “you should speak to her at once, and marry her as soon as she will let you.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

MRS. PRIOLO had not allowed the grass to grow under her feet. Immediately after her discoveries in Ellen Warde's room she had written to a friend in London who she knew always scrupulously kept the weekly newspapers she received from Australia, and asked her as a favor to lend her those of that winter when she and Mr. Bowyer had been separated. If the girl had committed any crime, the account of it would probably be in them, or at least she might find something in connection with her professional career which would furnish a clew.

Prejudiced though she was against the girl who had come between her and her hopes, the housekeeper never really believed that anything serious would be elicited; she thought it would probably turn out to be some girlish es-



capade to which Ellen attached exaggerated importance. Perhaps it was merely the fact that she had been an actress of which she was ashamed. If that was so, Mrs. Priolo would know how to play upon her weakness. But then what was the meaning of that horror-stricken face at the mention of her sister? Ah, well, time would show; and meanwhile she had prepared the old man's mind to believe whatever she should think well to fabricate against his protégée.

This illness of his was fortunate indeed, since, in his ordinary healthy frame of mind, she knew of old how difficult he was to cajole. As it was, already he shrunk from the girl's near presence, and had learned to look to his sister-in-law for everything he wanted, though it was still his pleasure to ignore that relationship. This was not enough. Ellen Warde must be driven away by fair means or by foul, lest the fickle fancies so common to old age should cause him to turn to her again. Then indeed would Mrs. Priolo's last state be worse than her first, for Ellen would surely never forgive her for what she had already said and done.

It was on the morning after she had overheard Mr. Bowyer telling Colonel Severn what he intended to do in the event of his niece's marriage that she received an answer to her letter in the shape of a large bundle of newspapers, for which she had to pay two or three shillings extra postage, in consequence of the postal regulations not having been complied with. So indignant was she at what she termed her friend's selfish carelessness that for some time she could not concentrate her attention on what was before her, and kept turning page after page in angry aberration. Then something caught her eyes that riveted her attention at once—"Theatrical Tragedy at Sydney! Murder of an Actress! Important Evidence of her Sister!"

Could this be what she sought?

Mrs. Priolo breathed quickly, and her thin face grew



flushed with suspense. She was in her own sitting-room, where no one ever intruded, but, as a further precaution, she rose and locked the door. She must sift this matter to the bottom.

As she read, and the conviction grew upon her that one of those who had been concerned in that dreadful tragedy was under the same roof with her, her excitement became more intense.

There could be no mistake—two sisters, actresses, both supposed to be in love with the same man. The one he chose for his wife was found murdered; and the person who was with her last, the owner of the pistol from which the fatal shot had been fired—who had also, as was proved, been on bad terms with her for the previous week—was her sister.

Mrs. Priolo recalled the photograph she had seen of the two girls and the sketch of a young man, who was probably the Gerald Weare mentioned in the inquiry, and not a doubt remained in her mind but that “Ellen Warde” was merely an *alias* for “Elaine Warrington.” Now the terror depicted so plainly on her face at the chance supposition that she might have had a sister was explained—it meant guilt. She was guilty of that sister’s death.

Only one fact struck her as strange. This being so, and every word of the evidence at the inquest having pointed to the one conclusion, why was the girl still free?

She turned over the page to see what the verdict had been.

“Willful murder against some person or persons unknown.” Why, surely none could have hesitated to pronounce who that person was after what had been proved! But this was only the coroner’s inquest, of course, and the real trial would follow.

She threw that paper impatiently on one side, and took up the next week’s issue. The first lines on which her



glance alighted told her all—"The Sydney Tragedy. Flight of the Suspected Murderess!"

Ah, now she remembered the whole affair! It had caused great excitement at the time, and, troubled though she had been by the strange absence of her brother-in-law, she could not but hear a great deal about it. Naturally she never dreamed that the two events had any connection with each other; but now she understood that it was Mr. Bowyer who had helped the girl to escape, and brought her to this out of the way place to save her from detection. Why he had done so was a problem still to be solved. What could have induced the hard-headed old lawyer to go so far out of his usually selfish course? No light reason could have induced him to aid in defeating the ends of justice.

A light tap was heard at the door; and, flushing guiltily, the housekeeper concealed the newspaper and stood up, forgetting that, even were any one inclined to disturb the privacy she always so jealously guarded, the turned key would prevent their entrance.

"It is I," said the soft voice of Ellen Warde. "Mr. Bowyer is asking for his soup."

"It is ready for him in the small saucepan standing on the hob," was the hasty reply; and the light footsteps echoed along the passage, and presently died away.

Mrs. Priolo was free to pursue her train of thought. She felt that it would have been impossible to face the rest of the household with the shock of the stupendous discovery she had made still fresh. Before she could do that she must grow a little accustomed to the horror of it, so that her knowledge might be unsuspected. First of all, too, she must fathom the mystery of Mr. Bowyer's action in the matter.

Could he have been attracted by the pretty face of the popular actress, having seen her only at the theater?

No, no; old men were, she knew, addicted to such senile fancies; but he was the very last in the world to make him-



self so ridiculous; nor had there been anything in his subsequent behavior to lead to such a supposition. Had he been in love with the girl, he would have married her before this; besides, he always addressed her in unmistakably paternal fashion.

Was she his daughter—legitimate or otherwise? That idea also she dismissed also as improbable, for her husband had always affirmed, when she questioned him on the subject—having already, even at that early period, had designs upon the fortune of the prosperous lawyer—that his brother's name had never been mentioned in connection with any woman.

The next question that occupied her mind was how to turn this discovery to her own advantage. This required careful thinking out; she held the game in her own hands now, and could win it when she chose with a little craft and patience. For too sensible a woman was Mrs. Priolo to ruin such a good chance by precipitancy, or to underrate the value of caution because success seemed sure.

Taking up the papers again, she read the whole case slowly through.

Not until she came to the very end did the full force of what she was reading strike her.

To entertain a doubt of the girl's guilt was impossible after weighing the evidence against her. She was a murderess, and had been living with them so long unsuspected and undreaded—was even now alone with her benefactor!

A very frenzy of fear seized the housekeeper and obscured her natural common sense. Starting up so suddenly that the papers fell apart and fluttered away in opposite directions, she hastily unlocked the door, and rushed upstairs as though all the prisoners in Newgate were let loose and were following swiftly at her heels.



## CHAPTER X.

RECALLING to mind his conversation with Colonel Severn, Mr. Bowyer felt that he had not shown to advantage—not behaved, in fact, as a gentleman should. He had revealed an eagerness to get rid of his niece which the circumstances certainly did not justify, and his unbecoming mention of the sum he intended to give as a dowry had been downright indelicate. His long residence in the Colonies must have blunted his natural refinement—or was it ill-health that made him selfish and unmindful of the feelings of others? He was thoroughly disgusted with himself and honestly repentant on Ellen's account. She had been so good and loving to him, so grateful for what he had done, so anxious to repay his kindness; and latterly he had not been kind.

It was the morning on which Mrs. Priolo had shut herself up in her own room to master the contents of the Australian newspapers, and the old man was alone, with ample leisure to think over and regret his late conduct. It added to his penitence when Ellen entered the room with some flowers, all sweet-scented and his favorites, for the vase on his table.

It was a hot oppressive day in July. Even in-doors, with a breeze blowing through the open window, Mr. Bowyer felt languid and inert. The girl was, as usual, dressed in deep mourning; her thick black merino, with heavy folds of crape, seemed almost to weigh her down; and she looked so pale and tired that Mr. Bowyer felt compelled to notice it.

“Child, have you no thinner clothes? That frock is getting shabby too. I noticed yesterday how brown it looked in the light.”

“The dust, I expect. We want rain badly. All my



flowers are shriveled up," said Ellen, stooping to brush the hem of her skirt with her handkerchief.

"The dust has not robbed you of your color too, I suppose?"—dryly.

"Ah, that is the heat, perhaps!"

"Don't you think that might be mitigated by wearing something thinner, more suited to the weather?"

Ellen crimsoned, but did not reply at once. She had no thinner gowns, and felt, as matters stood, that she could not accept anything from her benefactor's hand. So long as he had evidently felt pleasure in her presence and she had known that she was useful she had felt no scruples; but all this was altered now. Only mutual love, or at least sincere liking, could in her eyes do away with all feeling of obligation; and this there was no longer on his side; while she could not help resenting the sudden change, for which she had given no cause.

"It will get cooler soon," she said, presently; and then, disclosing what had been in her thoughts for the past few weeks, she added, "I think sometimes that this idleness is not the best thing for me. It gives me too much time for thought. And, then, why should I be a burden to you all my life? Don't imagine," she continued, earnestly, after a moment, going closer, then kneeling beside his chair—"don't imagine that I like to leave you—that it will not pain me more than you can guess to cut myself adrift from the shelter you have given me. Your wonderful kindness to me, an entire stranger, is a puzzle to me still. It was so generous, so noble of you to stand by me and lend me such powerful aid when even those who had been my friends held aloof. I have accepted your goodness freely, as I know it was ungrudgingly offered; but now—now I think it best for both our sakes that we should part."

"And what do you think of doing?"

The words sounded cold, almost unfeeling, in contrast with the fervor of her speech; but in reality Mr. Bowyer



was deeply hurt and ashamed that his own conduct should have led to this.

Not an accent of reproach had been in her voice, only love and gratitude; but he knew, as surely as though she had told him in plain words, that she wished to go because she felt she was no longer welcome. Uncomfortable and ill at ease, he took refuge in apparent displeasure at her suggestion.

“I thought of going as a governess,” she answered, timidly.

“You are well qualified, of course?”

“I know a little French; I can play and sing—that more for my own amusement than other people’s pleasure, I am afraid.”

He shook his head.

“Your voice is charming, but—forgive me for saying so—it is quite untrained; and nowadays so much is required from a governess.”

“Then a companion. At least I can read aloud, and make myself generally useful”—with a little hurt pride.

“Are you aware that for every situation as companion there are not less than fifty applicants?”

“Still by some lucky chance I might be the successful one.”

“You might,” agreed Mr. Bowyer, but with no conviction in his tones.

“Well, I can act. Why should I not go on the stage, under a feigned name?”

His eyes met hers gravely.

“You know as well as I do what objections there are to that scheme.”

“You mean that I should be recognized, tracked—that I might as well have never attempted to escape? Do you know that often I am tempted to go back of my own accord, and—and take my chance?”

Such a world of bitterness and despair lay in her tones



that Mr. Bowyer felt moved to deepest pity, and his own voice grew tremulous as he replied:

“Do you think me cruel to speak so? It is not that I am trying to prove that all doors are closed against you—it is because I want to keep you with me. When I offered you escape and a home, I did not act unadvisedly and without thought. I weighed the matter well, and resolved that, if I interfered at all, it should be to some purpose. When once I meddled with your fate I felt I was responsible for your future. And, Ellen, it has been a pleasure as well as a duty to try to make you happy; don't tell me I have failed!”

He spoke with enthusiasm and warmth, as in the old days when he had pleaded the cause of others and won renown. For a moment he believed all he said himself, so no wonder he convinced her.

“Forgive me!” she whispered, humbly, and covered the thin hand that was laid gently on her shoulder with passionately grateful kisses. “You are always right, always good. It is I—I who am wrong, misguided, and unjust.”

He laughed nervously, as though in deprecation of her praise.

“I don't suppose I shall keep you always,” he said. “Tell me—how do you like the colonel's son?”

“Very much. He is a dear boy, so thoughtful and kind, like—” Like his father, she had been going to add, then suddenly, seeing the drift of his question, stopped short.

“Anything like the husband you have doubtless pictured to yourself?”—smiling slyly.

“Husband? He? Oh, Mr. Bowyer, surely you forget!” she cried, in horrified surprise.

“I have forgotten nothing; but I think it is time the past should be ignored. Let it be a dream from which you have happily awakened to begin a new life.”

“You do not know—”

“I know nothing,” he interrupted, quickly; “nor do I



wish to pry into your secrets. If you have sinned, expiation is possible without despair. Lead a happy, healthy life, and that will teach you to forget."

"Do you mean," she said, in a low, strained voice, "that you seriously counsel me to marry Mr. Severn?" Then, starting to her feet, she broke out impatiently, without giving him time to reply, "We are talking idly; I shall never marry, whatever happens; and he—he has never dreamed of such a thing."

"Do not be too sure of that. His father spoke to me yesterday, and I expressed the pleasure I felt at the connection, and told him—I did not wish that they should think you portionless and friendless—that on your wedding-day I would give you twenty thousand pounds."

It was in Ellen's heart to cry out bitterly, "Is the burden of my presence so great that you would give such a sum as that to free yourself from it?" but, remembering all she owed him, she refrained. She only repeated—

"I shall never marry—never! You are goodness and generosity itself; but I want no money—no money—only love."

"My dear, there is no reason you should not have both. The young fellow must speak for himself."

A silence ensued, during which the old fear once more obtruded itself on the Anglo-Australian's mind. Was she indeed guilty of that crime? Nervously fixing his gaze on her half-averted face, he studied it until to his overwrought imagination it seemed as if the clear-cut features grew distorted with fury, the large sorrowful eyes became fiend-like in their unquenchable animosity and desire for revenge. Love and jealousy could, he well knew, transform what might have been angelic to devilry incarnate. Had such influences worked in her?

When Ellen turned round a moment later, she saw that he was trembling violently, with both hands grasping the



arms of his chair, while his drooping jaw and widely opened eyes seemed to denote intense pain or terror.

“You are ill!” she cried, springing up and fetching a decanter hastily from the other room, and pouring some brandy into a glass.

He drank about a spoonful slowly; then the color, of which every trace had gone from his face, returned, and he forced a faint smile.

“Don’t be frightened. It is only nervousness—nervous debility, I suppose it would be called. Some senseless idea seizes my mind and grows in horror till—till I lose all control over myself.”

“You must see the doctor again. It is dreadful for you to suffer so.”

“He can not help me. It is purely mental. In the autumn we will go away for a change—that will do me good. Don’t look so alarmed, child; I am all right again now.”

“But looking so pale and weak! Oh, if I could only do something for you—give you some of my useless health and strength!”

“You have none too much of that yourself,” he replied, dryly.

She opened the window wider, and pushed his chair more forward, so that he could see out, then went to remind Mrs. Priolo that it was twelve o’clock, and time for the invalid to have his soup.

Ten minutes later she came back with it herself.

She had toasted a thin piece of bread for him too, and was persuading him to try to eat it, when the housekeeper burst in and dragged the tray so roughly from her hands that nearly all the soup was spilled. At the same time she directed such a malicious glance at Ellen that the girl shrunk backward and dared not remonstrate. Mr. Bowyer however turned on her severely.

“What do you mean, madame?” he inquired so sternly



that Mrs. Priolo was recalled at once to prudence and her senses.

Was she mad to have acted so—thus to have shown her hatred of the girl and revealed the knowledge she possessed, which she could use with more effect at some other time? She had lost her head for the moment. Even though the girl was a murderess, it did not follow that, like a tigress who has tasted blood, she should continue a course of killing.

With something between a laugh and a sob, she stammered an incoherent excuse—the soup was not ready; she had forgotten to flavor it. Then, not waiting to hear Mr. Bowyer's testy rejoinder, she fled precipitately, tray in hand.

Ellen, bewildered and frightened, without knowing why, had also left the room, and was now prone upon her bed, weeping passionately bitter tears. It seemed as though no one wanted her, no one loved her—as though in all the wide, wide world there was no such desolate homeless waif as she.

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## CHAPTER XI.

IN Ellen Warde's sad thoughts the only brightness sprung from her friendship with the Severns. Intuitively aware of the colonel's interest in her, though to herself she called it only kindly feeling, she could not but like him in return, and by some subtle instinct guessed that if she ever needed help he would risk anything to serve her. But she would never put it to the proof. His dark eyes, grave at times even to severity, had somehow impressed her with the belief that he would be pitiful indeed and tender, but that the mere fact of a woman's needing such tenderness would rob her of his esteem. From what he had said she had not failed to discover that his ideal of womanhood was a high one. She would not like him even to know that she had



been on the stage; but she felt that she would well-nigh sink into the ground with shame were he to discover what had driven her into exile.

Charlie she feared less. He liked her for herself unquestioningly; and, if she elected to accept his love, she thought he would not alter.

Since Mr. Bowyer had spoken to her about it, she had felt sorely tempted at times to avail herself of the haven that it opened to her. None could tell how she yearned for such a rest; and it might never be offered to her again. He loved her sincerely now; but he was very young—  
younger by a year than she herself—and would soon recover from the blow if she refused him. Could she afford to thrust this happiness from her? Love was a turmoil and a pain—having loved once, she knew the sorrow of it; but to be beloved—ah, that would be indeed heaven, she thought.

All day long she hesitated, but in the afternoon, when Charlie came to try his fate, full of happy boyish enthusiasm tempered with a little boyish shyness, she knew at once that only one answer was possible. It would be a crime to give him less than he offered her, a whole undivided love; nor could she ease the burden she bore by laying it across his shoulders too. She could not doubly wreck his life.

Such a tender light was in her eyes as she went to meet him that no wonder the young fellow was deceived for a moment and his heart leaped high with hope.

“I—I am so glad you are alone; I want to speak to you. Will you walk a little way with me?” he begged earnestly, anxious to get beyond sight of the windows and possible lookers on.

She had come into the garden to meet him, so as not to disturb Mr. Bowyer, who was asleep; her hat was in her hand, and in answer to his request she put it on.

“Which way shall we go?” she asked.

“Any way—anywhere so that it be together!” was what



the boy thought; but he managed to stammer something more conventional instead, and went on talking till they stood alone and unobserved in a shady lane not far from the house. Then he turned and faced her recklessly, feeling the suspense too horrible to bear—that he must know his fate at once.

“Ellen, I love you! Will you be my wife?”

A crimson flush rose to her cheeks. Ah, it was sweet, sweeter than she had thought, to hear such words! She did so thirst for love—love and sympathy. Must she dash the cup away untasted? Some women are so rich in love and happiness that they could listen unmoved to such a story; some are so constituted that it could cause only a feeling of repulsion; but to Ellen this love which she did not, could never return came as a great temptation.

“Can’t you love me, dear? Won’t you be my wife?”

Simple words, yet tender, and his voice shook with emotion as he spoke them. Eloquent enough at times, just now he was too eager for a reply to say much himself.

Slowly she raised her eyes to his—hers so sad and full of unutterable longing for love, happiness, and a home; his so passionate and love-compelling. His tightly compressed lips gave evidence of determination, his whole face was aglow with love and hope.

“I am very sorry,” she began.

He caught her hands and nearly crushed them in his strong clasp as the stereotyped words fell upon his ear.

“Don’t—don’t say that,” he interrupted imploringly, “unless you wish to break my heart! I love you so—I love you so! You must not—can not refuse me!”

She smiled sadly and shook her head, and said—

“If it were only that I do not love you as you deserve to be loved—”

“If it were only that I could teach you!”—eagerly.

“But it is more—far more.”

“You—you love some one else?” he asked in a low voice,



not looking at her, feeling that it was a dreadful indelicacy to ask her such a question, yet knowing he could have no peace without a reply. "I might have known," he continued sadly, when she had answered with a single monosyllable of assent. "You are so far above me in every way, I ought to have known I had no chance; I was mad—presumptuous!"

"You are no such thing," she retorted, quickly. "Ah, if you only knew, you would say it was I who was unworthy! I—I— Great heavens, am I so hypocritical, so false, as to appear better than I am—is my whole life a deceit?"

He looked up eagerly.

"If," he said half hesitatingly—"if I thought you really meant that—if I could believe that there was something in your life which perhaps—forgive me for saying so, it seems so impossible, so insulting—but, if there were something you were ashamed of and did not wish to be known—"

"Well?" she interrogated gently, as he hesitated still.

"I would implore you not to let that stand between us. Oh, my darling, I love you so dearly that nothing can make any difference! I would believe nothing against you unless you confessed it yourself—scarcely then. And, even if I were forced to believe it, it could make no difference. Do you think anything could change or weaken my love?" She smiled sadly; the tears were nearly falling from her eyes. Once again the temptation came over her to resist no more, to allow herself so to be loved. The boy was so deeply in earnest, so handsome and so lovable! His eyes were gazing into hers, burning and melting by turns—his face was near her own—she could feel his breath upon her cheek. He was so tall and strong and stalwart, so full of youth and energy! She felt that, with her head upon his breast, his arms about her, she could rest in safety and be happy, even though she loved another. Then she turned away from him and broke the spell.



“It is all useless. There is a reason why I shall never marry; but I like you very much, and am so sorry to give you pain.”

He looked at her in mute distress.

“Good-bye,” she said.

“Good-bye,” he answered sadly.

When she had gone a little way, she turned, and saw that he was sitting on a fallen tree, his head buried in his hands. Some impulse of compassion prompted her to return. She knew so well what it was to suffer, and to suffer alone.

“Don’t fret,” she said wistfully, laying her hand gently upon his shoulder. “Nothing is worth such sorrow.”

For he was sobbing like a child, and so absorbed in his grief that he had not heard her approach him.

Now he raised his face, red with embarrassment, all the fire gone from his blue eyes.

“You must despise me for giving way so, but I thought you had gone; and—and it is forever.”

“No, no; you will forget after awhile; then we can be friends again. You are so young—younger than I am, you know—and it is only natural you should forget.”

A vehement, if incoherent denial, in spite of which she insisted—

“Yes, of course you will forget! You will meet some one a thousand times nicer some day and come and tell me all about her; and I will listen so patiently to all your raptures, and be so glad to see you happy again. It will make me miserable to think of you as you are now. You will try, won’t you, to forget me soon?”

She had kept her hand upon his shoulder to prevent him from rising, and now passed it gently over his curly hair. It was done caressingly, yet it gave him only pain. Something told him that she would never touch him so if she cared for him in the slightest degree. There was no hope for him—none!

When he raised his head again, she was gone—out of



sight already. Slowly he rose and wended his way toward home.

The colonel was seated at his writing-table, pen in hand. Ever since his son had left, nearly two hours before, looking so bright and handsome as he passed the window, in smart morning-coat and jaunty-looking hat, he had been in almost the same position, yet little or nothing had been transferred to the papers that lay before him. What he had done he had done mechanically. All his thoughts were centered on the scene that was then being enacted. He could scarcely restrain his impatience to know the result of the venture—whether Ellen would say “Yes” or “No.”

When Charlie came in at last, the colonel looked up inquiringly, but could frame no question—nor was it necessary. A single glance told him that the boy’s errand had been an unsuccessful one, dejection and rejection were written so plainly on his face.

For a moment George Severn experienced a jealous pleasure that it had been so, a deep relief that it would not be required of him to welcome to a daughter’s place the woman whom he would fain have won as wife. Then he felt ashamed and repentant. When Charlie, with a heavy sigh, threw himself on a settee, he was conscious only of a sympathetic sorrow.

“My poor boy—I am so grieved! Is there no hope?”

“None. I was a fool to fancy I could ever have a chance. She loves some one else. To her I am only a boy. She won’t believe how I love her; she—she—”

The sentence ended in a stifled sob.

Colonel Severn became strangely silent. Had Charlie raised his eyes, he must have been aware that the blow which had prostrated him had not been without its effect upon his father. But he was self-absorbed, and saw nothing.

“She said there was some secret—some reason why she



would never marry," he observed ruefully, after a short pause.

Severn paced the room for several minutes in agitated silence. When he stopped at length before his son, his expression was composed, and only a little tightness of the lips, a certain hard look in the eyes, might have betrayed to a close observer how he had suffered and was suffering still.

"Don't you think, Charlie, that it is for the best perhaps?" he suggested, in a strangely gentle voice. "You must not think me unfeeling in saying so, but, if there were any secret trouble that involved perhaps disgrace—"

"The more reason why I should bear it with her!" broke in the young fellow hotly. "You don't mean to say, dad, that you'd give her up for such a cause as that?"

"I—I?"—in some astonishment. "This is no question of what I should do at all. The two cases will admit of no comparison. Were I in such a case, it would be very different. The best years of my life are spent, and I have a right to do what I choose with the remainder; but you are only beginning your career—it behooves you to be careful not to wreck it at the outset."

"Then you think it is something—something shameful? Oh, father, if you knew her as well as I do, you would not wrong her so! You don't know how innocent and true she is. Every word she speaks seems to make one long to be better than one is; and her smile—"

It was Colonel Severn's turn to interrupt.

"Those are love rhapsodies," he said, with rather a forced smile. "All the same, if it be any comfort to you, I will confess I share your opinion. I believe her to be all that is sweet and womanly. If there is any guilt to conceal it is not hers—certainly not hers."

His son grasped his hand warmly.

"It is a comfort to hear you say that," he assured him. "You are always ready to sympathize and help. I don't



believe"—with an affectionate upward glance — "any other fellow has such a father."

"It is just as well you think so, my boy, because—for the present at least—we must be all-sufficient to each other."

"But you—you won't mind my going away for a bit? I don't feel as if I could meet her again just yet."

"You shall go where you like and do what you like. Fortunately it is no longer a question of ways and means. If you care to go to Paris—"

"London will do well enough, and Lysley of the Guards asked me to stay with him. The season is not over—at any rate, there is more going on there than anywhere else, I suppose. Not that I am in the mood for gayeties at all," he added quickly.

A half smile flitted across the elder man's grave face, but it was instantly suppressed.

"Then London it shall be," he said, and found it in his heart to wish that he could so break away from the chains that bound him, and believe it possible that a little gayety or change might mitigate, even cure, his pain.

"Young man's love burneth up brightly and is done,  
But old man's love burneth deeply to the bone."

Some couplet to this effect he remembered to have read, and acknowledged now its truth. This hopeless passion which consumed him was stronger than himself. It kept him in the vicinity of Ellen Warde against his better judgment—almost against his will. Just to know that she was near—that when he wished it he could see her—was enough; and, though she loved another, some day it might be that she would lean upon his friendship, ask him for his aid—for somehow he was convinced that she would need help before long. Everything pointed in that direction. Her guardian's altered feelings, the old housekeeper's evident animosity, and then this secret which she had hinted at—all



betokened future trouble for her whose safety might be threatened at any moment.

Yes, certainly he would stay there still, ready to watch events on her behalf, to guard her so far as he was able.

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## CHAPTER XII.

MRS. PRIOLO had decided on her plan of action. It had flashed upon her instantaneously when, as she snatched away the soup that morning, her eyes lighted for a second upon Ellen's white frightened face. She had seen in columns of police news how a previous conviction told against a prisoner, and she resolved she would work on that idea.

Her terror that morning had been genuine, though senseless, as she now saw; but it was not impossible that Mr. Bowyer, in his present nervous excitable state, might be brought really to believe that what the girl had done once she might do again, were the motive sufficiently strong. But first she must find out how much Mr. Bowyer knew—whether by any chance he was unacquainted with all that had occurred in Sydney that winter. She was also anxious to discover if he had mentioned to Ellen his intention of giving her so large an amount for her dowry.

With this idea in her brain, she took her work and sat with Mr. Bowyer one afternoon when Ellen was out sketching.

It was Mr. Bowyer who by chance opened the subject that she was anxious to discuss.

“Where is Ellen?” he asked.

“Gone out with her drawing materials. She went about an hour ago.”

“Ah, sketching is a great resource! I am glad she has an occupation to amuse her. Since we have been here, I don't fancy the child has looked so well. What do you think, Mrs. Priolo?”



“I have been thinking so myself. It seems to me as though she gave way too much. Of course”—a little tartly—“I am quite in the dark as to the reason of her grief, and I do not know for whom she wears such very deep mourning; but it is more than a year now since she came to you—long enough for any young woman to get over a healthy sorrow.”

Mr. Bowyer walked over to the window and looked out. “There are different degrees in everything,” he said, after a while. “It is difficult for any outsider to mark the limits of another’s grief. She, poor child, has had a terrible experience indeed; small wonder she finds it impossible to forget.”

It was to Mrs. Priolo’s interest to appear to know nothing of Ellen Warde’s past, in order that whatever she should bring against her hereafter might have more weight; so she struck in quickly, lest by any chance he should think of telling her the story—

“Still brooding does no good. She should make an effort to shake it off. You must tell her so, Mr. Bowyer—she will listen to you. The poor girl seems to have taken an unaccountable dislike to me, and would resent any interference on my part.”

The old man turned and looked at her shrewdly.

“It is the first time I have heard of this dislike. May I inquire the reason of it?”

“I am sure I don’t know, unless—”

“Unless?”

“She’s a strange girl, not affectionate by nature, but possessing a very clear knowledge of the value of money—or rather the things money can procure.”

“You give her a good character”—dryly.

“The faults of youth,” observed the housekeeper indulgently—“she will outgrow them. When she is my age, she will know that riches can not purchase happiness—that friendship and affection are worth far more.”



“Yes—exactly. But you were going to explain her dislike to you.”

“Ah, poor child, that is jealousy, I sometimes think! She has set her heart upon inheriting your fortune, and fancies”—laughing gayly—“that I have designs upon it too.”

Mr. Bowyer's face was still turned from her, so the housekeeper could not judge of the effect of her words. She went on carelessly—

“No, no, she need have no fear of me! Before she came, the thought may have crossed my mind that perhaps, as I was your only relative, you might remember me in your will; but directly Ellen Warde appeared I relinquished the idea without a sigh. I knew you too well to believe that you would enrich a comparatively distant connection at the expense of your own sister's child. I am too just myself to wish such a thing.”

Mr. Bowyer made no attempt either to substantiate or to deny the truth of her assertion.

“Strange,” went on Mrs. Priolo thoughtfully, “that my husband should never have mentioned he had a sister—it must have been a sister, as the name is different. He so often spoke of you with deepest affection! Before he died he said, ‘Robert will welcome you as his own sister. You will never need a friend.’ He spoke truly—I never have.”

The housekeeper, in her anxiety to impress upon her brother-in-law what was his duty, had overreached herself. Mr. Bowyer saw that she suspected there was no relationship between himself and his ward, saw too that she was not so indifferent as to the disposal of his wealth as she affected to be. He smiled a little cynically as he replied—

“You will find that I have not forgotten the faithful service of the last ten years, nor the fact that you were once my brother's wife.”

“You are too good,” murmured Mrs. Priolo.



“Half of my fortune is left to you.”

“Half!” echoed Mrs. Priolo, various emotions mingling in her low excited tone. There was some surprise at this unusual outspokenness on her employer’s part, curiosity as to who else was to share his bounty, pleasure that at least so much was assured to her, chagrin that she was not to receive more. Half his fortune would be no inconsiderable sum, as she knew well; but why should she not have all?

“Half,” went on Mr. Bowyer, calmly, “will belong to Ellen.”

The housekeeper started to her feet, and her work, falling to the ground, was swept along by her stiff silk gown as she hurriedly crossed the room.

“Have you told her this?” she inquired, laying her hand heavily on his arm.

“Why do you ask?”

“Tell me,” she requested sharply.

Mr. Bowyer’s nervousness began to show itself in a violent trembling, which he tried in vain to control. His face twitched painfully.

“I told her that she would have twenty thousand pounds when she married,” he answered at last, with an effort.

“And you said nothing about your will to her?”

“Nothing—so far as I can remember.”

“Then don’t tell her now, I beg and implore you,” was the reply, in which intense relief and earnest entreaty were excellently simulated.

The old man could not but be impressed by her manner, though he tried hard to maintain the shrewd judgment and keen insight on which he had formerly prided himself.

“I am at a loss to understand your motive for speaking so,” he remarked stiffly.

For a moment there was a pause, while Mrs. Priolo picked up her wool and disentangled the skeins with elaborate care. She was wondering how much she dared say,



how much he was prepared to believe. Then, with diabolical cunning, she decided to remain silent, and let what she had already said take root. Thus she would remain unimplicated; and nothing she could invent would be so horrible, she knew, as those nameless unspoken terrors that press upon a mind diseased.

“I have no motive. We women have very little judgment, and no logic; but we have a weapon of our own to defend ourselves and—and those dear to us. Instinct prompted me to say what I did. Even to myself it seems absurd and uncalled for. But”—with a little catch in her voice which might have made her fortune had the stage been her profession—“don’t disregard my warning.”

Mr. Bowyer opened his mouth to speak, but no words came. He was so deeply agitated that he could not even affect composure any longer. Sinking into his chair, he leaned back with closed eyes and pallid face; while Mrs. Priolo, alarmed at the effect of her words, hastily fetched her smelling-salts from the mantel-piece, and chafed his hands, which were icy cold.

“Forgive me!” she said impulsively. “I have frightened myself and you needlessly, I am sure. There can be no sense in my fears. Forget all I have said, or disbelieve it.”

She spoke these words in all good faith. Unprincipled schemer though she was, her heart was not quite so hard that she could look unmoved upon the suffering she herself had caused to one who had been her benefactor. For the moment she was honestly anxious to withdraw the sting which she had planted; but her words had an opposite effect to that intended. Mr. Bowyer, detecting the ring of real feeling in her voice, jumped to the conclusion that all she had said and implied was true, or at least that she believed it so. If she wanted to retract what she had said, it was on his account, because she did not think him strong enough to face what she feared.



"It is nothing. I often have these attacks," he said faintly, trying to reassure her.

She appeared to accept his explanation.

"You are looking better now. The doctors here don't seem to understand your case; the place itself does not suit you. Why not go back to Australia?"

"I wish to Heaven I could!" he cried, too utterly broken down to preserve his usual caution.

"Why should you not?"

"Because there is such a thing as honor, which gentlemen are bound to consider; because a promise must be kept at all hazards, all risks; because I have made a mistake and must abide by it."

The housekeeper knew well to what he alluded, and her pulses beat with excitement and triumph. So far she had succeeded in her plans; the affection which Mr. Bowyer had once felt for his protégée was rapidly changing to aversion or something very much like it. He had begun to suspect her, doubt her, and already felt the care of her, to which he had pledged himself, a burden he would gladly throw off if he could. He was too honorable to do so without a cause; it remained for Mrs. Priolo to find an incontestable reason why the obligation should cease and the girl be abandoned to her own devices.

"You know best, of course," she observed demurely, reseating herself. "But remember there is a duty one owes to one's self, as well as that claimed by others."

Mr. Bowyer did not reply. Looking up furtively now and then, Mrs. Priolo saw that he was in deep and anxious thought. She would have given much to discover what was passing through his brain—much to know how far he would succumb to the fear that evidently possessed him.

How changed he was! A year ago she might as well have whistled to the wind as have tried to persuade him that any one had designs upon his fortune or his life. He would have seen through her at a glance, and laughed at her in-



sinuations, if indeed he had not dismissed her instantly from his service. Then she would never have dared to speak to him so, for fear of bringing upon herself the fate she was preparing for another; but now he was a different man—so weak in mind and body that he was at the mercy of those about him. One thing seemed certain, that if she obtained her desire she would not have long to wait for the money she coveted so strongly. His life would not have been considered worth a year's purchase by a less interested person than the woman who watched him then as he sat by the open window, bent nearly double from weakness, his face thin to transparency, and his frail hands clasping the arms of his chair—a frequent action of his now, as though he felt the need of support.

Ellen Warde's voice was heard outside, and he shrunk back nervously.

“You are not well enough to be disturbed now. Shall I tell Miss Warde not to come in just yet?” asked the housekeeper, divining his thoughts.

He looked up with eager gratitude for her help, and made a gesture of assent.

Yet, when she left the room to carry out her suggestion, he felt ashamed and regretful—he scarcely knew why. In the housekeeper's presence those doubts and fears she seemed to share had appeared reasonable; but, now he was alone, he wondered at his own credulity. Ellen's voice had somehow reminded him of Ellen's face—the sad gray eyes and patient mouth which were so like those of the only woman whom he had ever loved and whose life he had spoiled by his mean suspicions. Was it his nature to doubt, or was it his unhappy fate to meet only with those unworthy of trust?

The problem was a hard one—too hard for him to solve in his present weak excited state; and he relinquished the effort with a sigh.

When Mrs. Priolo returned, she found that, utterly ex-



hausted by the mental conflict through which she had caused him to pass, he had fallen into a deep sleep.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

“AND so you sent my poor boy away?”

Colonel Severn was the speaker. He had strolled over to the Dower House one evening after dinner, and, Mr. Bowyer being indisposed and in his own room, and Mrs. Priolo seldom intruding when visitors were there, it so happened that for the last half-hour he and Ellen Warde had been in the pretty dimly-lighted sitting-room alone.

At first they had talked only of generalities, but the colonel suddenly broached the subject of which both had been thinking, and Ellen's pale face flushed crimson as she answered, meekly deprecating his displeasure—

“I could not help it—indeed it could not have been otherwise. I hope you are not angry with me?”

“Angry? No.”

An involuntary smile flitted across his face—anger was so utterly opposed to the feelings that had been in his heart when his son had told of his discomfiture. Detecting in a moment his expression of amusement, Ellen drew herself up haughtily—her versatility of mood was not her least charm in George Severn's eyes.

“I forgot,” she said bitterly—“most probably you thought it a subject for self-congratulation that your son had escaped marriage with one of whom you know absolutely nothing. The heir to Gorst Abbey should naturally look higher.”

“Miss Warde, how can you do me such injustice? For my son's sake I was sincerely grieved—I could not have wished for him a sweeter wife; if for my own sake I was selfishly glad, can't you understand that it would have been hard for me to lose a friend, even though at the same mo-



ment I gained a daughter? Of course it might be possible to combine the two—only I should not care for such a combination.”

Ellen's eyes were fixed demurely on her work. If her heart beat a little faster, responsive to the meaning in his tone, there was no outward sign of confusion as her needle flew swiftly in and out.

“You see,” went on the colonel, with rather a comical expression about his mouth, “I have never felt the need of a daughter; the possession of one would doubtless add to the comfort of my old age—but I don't feel that approaching yet.”

“Of course not. You are quite young. It seemed absurd to think of you as the father of your son.”

“I was forty-five a month ago; but somehow I have never felt so young as lately. My existence has been a very lonely one since I had to part with my boy. I married when I was one or two and twenty; up to that time I had scarcely spoken to a woman, and afterward, when my wife died, I was content with my child's companionship. When he left me, the thought of him still filled my life; I never cared to form a friendship even—not a real friendship—though I liked many of the men in my regiment and met with great kindness and good-fellowship from them. Do you know, Miss Warde, that when I returned from India, gray-haired veteran as I may seem to you, I had never been in love?”

Was it the flickering light, as a sudden wind sprung up and swept in through the open window, that made the girl seem so pale? Only for a moment. Quickly she recovered herself, and laughed lightly as she replied—

“Do you expect pity for that? Why, I think you are to be envied, having had no doubts and fears, no disappointments, no sentimental troubles of any sort.”

“Is that your real opinion?” he asked her, gravely. Do you really think love is of so little worth that the



pains and penalties which accompany it sometimes are too heavy a price to pay?"

She was as grave as he now; a wistful look was in her eyes, as though a happiness were within her reach which yet she must not stretch out her hand to grasp.

"It does not matter what I think," she said; "my future is decided, and love has no part in it."

She shivered slightly as she spoke, and he rose and closed the window.

"It is getting chilly in the evening now. The summer is nearly over."

Silently she assented, and once more all her attention was given to her work, while he sat and watched her.

How slight—almost delicate—she looked, yet with something of dignity and self-reliance that sat strangely on her child-like face and willowy pliant form! What was it made her so unlike any other woman he had ever met? Severn wondered. Was it the bright hair, falling in soft rings on her forehead and her neck, as though resenting the boyish fashion into which it had been forced, that contrasted so oddly with the womanly sweetness of her mouth and appealing pathos of her large gray eyes? She was such a strange mixture of weakness and strength, gayety and sadness. It seemed as if cruel circumstances had compelled her to belie her nature. What was this mystery which shadowed her life? Had it anything to do with the love which, according to Charlie, she had already given—to her cost, as he opined?

That being so, there was no chance for him. Ah, well, he was a man, and could bear pain, perhaps stamp it out in time by the force of his strong will! But she, poor child, brave as she was, how could she battle successfully with hopeless love as well as that other secret sorrow?

"Let me help you if I can!" he exclaimed impulsively.

Ellen looked up in sore surprise, not comprehending at first. Then, understanding that he spoke with reference to



his own thoughts, not in answer to anything she had said, she smiled gratefully.

“If there is anything I ever want, I will ask you—I promise,” she said sweetly.

Their hands met in a firm clasp for an instant. Then Colonel Severn changed the subject.

“I heard from Charlie to-day. I fancy he is enjoying himself in spite of his resolve to be miserable. His friends seem to belong to rather a reckless set. I only hope they won’t lead him into any mischief.”

“Why, what do you fear for him?” asked Ellen.

“Nothing definite. I suppose it is a parent’s privilege to be anxious without reason. He is such a good open-hearted fellow, but impressionable, and too easily led. I should not like him to get intimate with the acquaintances he has made lately. There is an actress—”

“Do you object to his associating with her?”—laying down her work, and looking steadily into his face.

“I don’t think it will do him any good. You think me uncharitable, I see. Perhaps I am; but I should like to keep his idea of womanhood high, which he can best do by knowing only women whose associations are refined, whose purity is beyond question. Now an actress leads a life of spurious excitement that must necessarily—”

“Stop!” cried Ellen, raising her hand with an imperious gesture. “I have been an actress myself. Don’t say anything you might regret.”

She had risen to her feet; and he too rose, feeling utterly bewildered, and scarcely trusting his own ears. That this stern child, with her innocent big eyes and shy yet winning ways, should ever have trod the stage and faced a mixed audience seemed impossible—absurd. The mere thought of it enraged him. She, his little love, who had crept so securely into his heart that nothing now could ever displace her, to have been the central object of such a crowd, liable to coarse criticism and still more brutal admiration—oh,



it would be maddening if true! But it was not true! It could not be! She was testing him—trying how much he could credit against her.

“You don’t believe me, but it was so really; and you must not think I am ashamed of it. It is as honorable a profession as any other; and I could have been very happy in it if—if—”

Her voice broke, and she turned away her head to hide the hot stinging tears that had sprung into her eyes as bitter recollections came surging through her brain. He thought she was hurt at what he had said.

“I am a brute; and have offended you beyond recall,” he declared at last, so humbly that, if she had felt any wrath, it must have melted away; “but I was speaking carelessly, and on a subject of which I know nothing. Remember I have been all my life in India, and am naturally old-fashioned and narrow in my views. They are subverted from this moment. The mere fact of your having adopted it makes the profession one worthy of any woman to follow.”

“Is not that rather a sudden conversion?” smiled Ellen, archly, touched, in spite of herself, by his earnestness.

“It is not the less sincere. I think you must have seen, Miss Warde, how high you stand in my opinion—how I admire and revere you. In my eyes you could do nothing wrong. There is no one whose friendship would be so dear to me—since I must ask no more.”

The last few words were almost inaudible, and Ellen guessed rather than heard their import, and a strange disquietude kept her silent. She did not know that Charlie had betrayed her confidence, and thought her anomalous position was the reason for what he had said. After all, what did it matter? She did not love him; her love had been given long ago to some one very different; and women do not change. But a feeling of embarrassment caused



her to keep her eyelids down, and the color came and went in waves upon her cheeks.

He too was deeply moved, and felt it a relief when Mrs. Priolo entered to say that Mr. Bowyer would like to see the colonel before he left. Directly she was alone Ellen sunk upon a sofa and buried her face in her hands. She felt perturbed, she knew not why, and self-reproachful. In her eagerness to be frank with him she had said too much, and given a clew to her antecedents which might ultimately lead to her detection were he to follow it up. That he would not do so she knew; but conviction might be forced upon him some day; and was it fair to thrust upon his shoulders a burden which she herself felt so terribly hard to bear? She knew that if he ever came to know all the terrible past, and shrunk from her in horror, it would be the last drop in the cup that was already so bitter to her lips.

Though she loved elsewhere, and to her cost, yet she could have found the friendship of this other very sweet, only that it would be better to refuse it now than, having once enjoyed it, to feel it withdrawn from her forever.

Presently she heard Colonel Severn's footstep on the stairs, then passing along the hall. Some one opened the outside door for him, and closed it. He was gone—gone without a word of farewell! Was this the first fruits of her mad confession?

Heart-sore and weary of the endless struggle to act for the best, Ellen burst into tears, weeping more violently from the very effort to stifle the sounds of her grief.

Mrs. Priolo, who had herself escorted the visitor downstairs, heard the girl's sobs, and entered noiselessly. For a while she stood looking down at her pitilessly. How could such a wretch expect mercy? thought the woman who had never been tempted to commit a crime.

“Mr. Bowyer is waiting for you to say good-night,” she said at last, sharply. “Are you coming?”



The sound of her voice acted as a stimulus to the girl's nerves. She dried her eyes at once, and got up, strangling the sob that rose rebelliously in her throat.

"I will go now. I did not know it was so late."

"Not with that face, I should hope—unless you wish to work on Mr. Bowyer's sympathy. For my part, I think such repining downright wicked, especially when one's as well off as you are now. It looks as if you had something on your mind."

"Perhaps I have," said Ellen, wearily, as she put away her work.

"Then take my advice, and don't show it so plainly. Curiosity is aroused already by your strange behavior; don't let it become an actual suspicion unless, of course"—with a sneer—"your past life will bear looking into."

The girl's pale scared face was turned toward her tormentor in agonized suspense, but Mrs. Priolo deliberately avoided meeting her gaze. Not waiting for a reply, or giving the other time to get out of the room, she turned out the gas, and both were left in darkness.

Was it Ellen's excited fancy, or did she really hear a whisper—three words muttered in a low malicious tone that the prevailing silence rendered clear and cruelly distinct—"Her own sister"?

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## CHAPTER XIV.

To open one's eyes on a pleasant sunny morning, when a balmy breeze is blowing and birds are singing in the trees, gives a curious sense of unreality when the preceding night has been a wakeful one and terrible with dire forebodings. All seems like a dream, and in the first reaction one is inclined to underrate the dangers that may have been exaggerated before.

So it was with Ellen Warde.

As she fled upstairs on the night before with those accusing words, "Her own sister!" ringing in her ears, her only



chance of safety seemed to lie in immediate flight, leaving no trace behind; but, with the sun shining through her window, and signs and sounds of commonplace life all about, her views changed.

She was aware of the housekeeper's eagerness to drive her away, and came to the conclusion that this was only a ruse to effect her purpose. She had seen the effect of her former chance allusion, and was harping on the same string. Ellen's natural courage reasserted itself. She would not allow herself to be so easily beaten; she must at least show a brave front, and find out, if possible, the enemy's strength. Mrs. Priolo had declared war—well, she would find the challenge taken up.

When the breakfast-bell rang, Ellen went down-stairs singing softly to herself, fastening a crimson rose into her belt as she entered the room, which relieved her from the necessity of encountering the housekeeper's first glance of startled surprise.

"Bless my heart, you're looking fine and gay this morning! Have you heard good news?" was asked, bluntly.

"No; but I have received some good advice, and mean to profit by it. As you say, it is of no use grieving forever," said Ellen, seating herself at table, and by her well-assumed unconcern utterly baffling the keen gaze that was directed toward her.

"Humph! It's well for those who can forget. There's some who have no right to be happy and contented like other folk."

"I hope you don't mean yourself, Mrs. Priolo. I should be sorry to think you were one of those."

The light *insouciance* of the retort goaded the elderly woman almost to madness. She crossed over to Ellen's side and bent down till their faces nearly touched.

"I'll tell you who is!" she cried, with spiteful emphasis; but, before another word could leave her lips, Mr. Bowyer's entrance created a diversion.



“What is this?” he asked testily. “Is breakfast not ready? The bell rang some time ago.”

Ellen jumped up lightly and drew his chair to the table. “Mrs. Priolo was just going to tell me a story. She must reserve it for some other time,” she explained, with a pleasant smile; then, turning to the housekeeper, who was white with rage—“If you will go and hurry them in the kitchen, I will make the tea for my uncle.”

A defiant emphasis was laid on the last word; and Mrs. Priolo had no choice but to leave the room as requested.

When she returned, Ellen was retailing little bits of news that she had heard from Colonel Severn the night before, and Mr. Bowyer was talking more brightly than he had done for some time.

“How bonny you look, child! You must come and read to me this morning. I have been afraid to ask you to do so lately, you have seemed so tired and ill.”

“But now I am better, and mean to turn over a new leaf. All the effects of your lecture, Mrs. Priolo!”

The housekeeper maintained a dogged silence. She dared not retort in Mr. Bowyer’s presence; but a spiteful gleam in her eyes threatened retaliation at some future time. Ellen noted and understood; but, though her spirit quailed inwardly, she gave no sign of being daunted.

Afterward, when at last the invalid fell asleep, soothed by her clear mellifluous tones as she read aloud, and she was free from observation, the mask fell, and her face looked the more worn and troubled from the light-heartedness that she had assumed till then. With the strain removed, the tension of her nerves relaxed—she felt dispirited, hopeless. Discovery would, she felt sure, come sooner or later; still she might delay, though not able to avert it.

Noiselessly she arose and went over to the writing-table. She had determined to beg Colonel Severn to say nothing of what she had so thoughtlessly admitted the night before. He would, she was confident, make no use of the knowledge



he had gained; but in other hands the clew might be a dangerous one.

“DEAR COLONEL SEVERN,” she wrote, glancing stealthily now and again in the direction of the sleeping man, lest he should awake and question her—“What I said last night was said impulsively and without thought. It might injure me irretrievably were it to become known that I had been an actress. May I rely upon your kindness to keep it secret? You may probably imagine that the request arises from the false pride which I disclaimed last night; but it is not so indeed. I wish I could tell you all; but that is impossible. I can only throw myself upon your generosity and trust you will think as well as you possibly can of

“Yours sincerely,

“ELLEN WARDE.”

She slipped the note into an envelope and directed it, waiting for an opportunity to send it to its destination. This came sooner than she expected. A man arrived from the Abbey with a basket of flowers and fruit; and, intercepting him as he passed the sitting-room window, she emptied the contents herself and gave him the note to take back. Then quietly she returned to her place.

Presently Mr. Bowyer awoke.

“What were you and Mrs. Priolo sparring about this morning?” he asked, abruptly.

Ellen hesitated a moment before replying, then resolved to win him to her side if possible. He had taken upon himself the office of her protector; it behooved her to be frank with him, although it was utterly foreign to her nature to speak ill of any one in her absence.

“She is not very kind to me sometimes. I think she resents my being here.”

“I thought as much,” put in the old man, quietly.

“And latterly she has been hinting at a knowledge of—you know what I mean.”



"Yes, I know, child; but surely she is only pretending that to alarm you! While we were abroad she knew nothing, I am certain; and it is impossible that she could have found out anything in this out of the way place. No, no; she is trying to frighten you—that is all."

"You really think so?"—eagerly.

"I am nearly sure of it. Even if by any chance she did discover the truth, she would not dare to make use of it for fear of offending me. Besides, she is not a bad sort really, though I suspect, like most women, she has a keen eye to the main chance."

"Oh, if that is all," cried Ellen, passionately, "let her mind be set at rest! Tell her—swear to her if necessary—that you have no intention of giving me anything beyond food and shelter while I can be of use to you. I want nothing more except—"

He looked at her searchingly. Like many who have money to leave behind them, he was always ready to question the motives of all about him; he could scarcely have trusted his own flesh and blood, so deeply rooted was his suspicion of poor human nature; and these two women who would ultimately possess his hard-won wealth were neither kith nor kin.

"Except what?" he asked, sharply.

"I should like you to love me," she answered wistfully. "I am no more to you than a servant, unless you care to have me with you and like me to wait on you. Don't you remember telling me once that I was like some one very dear?"

"You are very like her," softly.

"It was that that induced me to make my home with you. My first impulse was to relieve you of the burden of my presence directly I was safe from pursuit. Then you told me that I could best return your goodness by staying with you; and you were so ill just then, and alone, that I thought if you did not grudge the expense of keeping me I



would spare no pains to be to you what a child of your own might have been. If"—her voice trembling a little—"I have failed, has it been entirely my fault?"

"No," he answered her, gravely; "it has been mine—all mine. What I told you then was true. Your resemblance to her made your presence a pleasure from the first; then I grew fond of you for your own sake. I love you still; but this illness has changed me sadly—I don't seem always master of myself or responsible for my actions. When these nervous attacks come on, I am afraid of every one; the very air seems full of danger."

"Surely you are not afraid of me?"

"Not in my sane moments," he answered, smiling. "It would require some one with a more jaundiced vision than mine to read anything but truth and good faith in those big gray eyes of yours; and"—taking her slim white hand in his—"I should not consider this very formidable even were it raised against me."

Instantaneously the same thought flashed through the minds of both—how, in spite of this, only a year before she had stood up to defend herself from suspicion of murder, though not actually arraigned upon the charge.

Remorseful for having thus inadvertently recalled so painful a memory, in silent sympathy he pressed the hand he still held; but, shuddering convulsively, she withdrew it and walked over to the window, looking out until she had regained some command over her countenance.

For nearly five minutes she stood so, her face pressed against the cool glass, wishing with all her heart that the past could be blotted out, or by some Lethæan process forgotten.

Then she turned and suggested to Mr. Bowyer that she should read to him again. He motioned her to a footstool near; and, when Mrs. Priolo came to the door a little later, and, gently opening it, looked in, she saw Ellen seated at his feet reading aloud in the low sweet voice which she could not but be aware was pleasanter to the ear than her



own strident tones, while on her short hair the old man's hand rested in affectionate caress.

Withdrawing as silently as she had come, the housekeeper went down-stairs considerably crest-fallen. She had ventured too far, tried to effect too much at once. It had been an error of judgment, and, instead of ridding herself at a blow of the obnoxious intruder who stood between her and her hopes, she had only succeeded in driving her to stand at bay, and at the same time caused a better understanding between her and Mr. Bowyer. Yes, she had gone too far; but it would not do to retreat. Having betrayed her hatred of Ellen Warde, she could only now endeavor to give good reason for it; to deny it would be futile.

For a while she could do nothing. It would be wiser to let the events of the day fade a little from the old man's feeble mind before attempting to convey new impressions, and in the meantime she would have ample leisure to evolve a plan. No feeling of compunction restrained her. In her own mind she considered it a righteous war against one who was without the pale of pity, who by her own act had rendered herself an outcast and caused the hand of every one to be against her. Had it not been that Mr. Bowyer had elected to shelter and defend her, the housekeeper would have denounced her at once, and there would have been no need of cunning. The old man was in his dotage and irresponsible; still, though she dared not go against him openly, she might by underhand means defeat him and gain her own ends.

No answer came to Ellen's note that day. On the following morning, about the time that a messenger usually came from the Abbey with the daily gift of flowers and fruit, she went down the road a little way until she met the man.

"Have you a letter for me?" she asked, stopping short.

"No, miss"—touching his hat respectfully. "The colonel went to London yesterday. I never heard a word



about it, or would have told you of it then; but the butler said as how he'd send your letter on with some others that came this morning; so it will get to him all right."

"Thank you; that will do nicely."

Stooping, she buried her face among the sweet-smelling flowers that lay in a bed of soft green moss. One magnificent white lily raised its head above the rest, and Ellen took it in her hand.

"What a beauty!" she said, admiringly.

"Stewart says it's the biggest he has ever reared. The master saw it the other day when 'twas only in bud, and he said, 'You must send that to the Dower House—the young lady there is fond of flowers.'"

She had been about to replace it in the basket; now she withdrew her hand.

"I will carry it myself," she said, and motioned to him to go on.

Her cheeks were glowing and an unaccountable tremor was at her heart. She was glad he thought of her sometimes, if only in so small a matter as the giving of a flower. The thought struck her, deepening the color already so high in her cheeks, that a woman might well prize the love of such a man—even his friendship was worth having. He was the sort of ideal hero she had dreamed of before that dark shadow fell upon her life, and before she gave her heart unsought, or at least unclaimed, to another. Even as it was she liked him well—so well that a cold feeling of disappointment, as at an actual loss, had crept over her when she heard of his departure, and she knew she would look anxiously for his return. While he was over at the Abbey she felt safer, less lonely, though they seldom met. Was even this poor comfort to be withdrawn?

She had watched so eagerly for an answer to her note, wondering what he would say and how he would address her! Long before daylight she had awakened and awaited for the dawn, thinking the letter might come. And now



there was none, and he had gone. Was it likely he would hurry back when there was nothing in this quiet uninteresting place to attract him, and the whole world was before him to choose his residence?

She sighed, and laid the lovely blossom softly against her cheek, finding the contact of the velvety petals cool and grateful to the touch. The next moment, whether startled by her own action or some sudden thought, perhaps only overpowered by its strong pervading perfume, she flung it from her, and, walking on rapidly, left it to wither on the ground.

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## CHAPTER XV.

A FEW mornings later, as Ellen came out of her bedroom, Mrs. Priolo emerged from hers also, and called her by name.

She was in a violet flannel dressing-gown, and capless, and her disordered gray hair gave her so unusual an appearance that for the moment Ellen scarcely recognized the prim housekeeper who was ordinarily seen only in the stiffest and most conventional attire. Besides, as a rule, at this hour she was down-stairs and had got through most of her work, so as to be at liberty to remain with Mr. Bowyer after breakfast.

“What is the matter?” cried Ellen, in surprise.

“I’ve had a dreadful night. The rats never let me sleep a moment hardly. They’re bad enough always, but last night they were beyond all bearing.”

“I have never been troubled by them at all,” said Ellen, adding, with a puzzled look, “I have never heard you complain before.”

“I’m not one to go about moaning and groaning every time anything annoys me; but I’ve come to the limit of my patience now. Something must be done to get rid of them.”



“Are you coming down to breakfast?” asked Ellen, wondering at the housekeeper’s diffuseness; for since their passage-at-arms a day or two before they had scarcely exchanged a word.

“No, I’m too worn-out. I want you to tell Mr. Bowyer the reason why I could not come. I must have an hour’s sleep before I dress. Jane brought me a cup of tea, which is all I want. You will see that Mr. Bowyer has all he requires? Mind the coffee is freshly ground, and don’t forget the newspapers—”

“I shall be able to look after my uncle,” interposed Ellen, haughtily, as she turned away.

She took especial pains that everything should be as nice as, if not nicer than, usual that morning; but Mr. Bowyer came down in a cross humor, and was difficult to please. Like most invalids, he disliked a change from the usual routine, and resented anything that interfered with his comfort. The housekeeper had been with him so long, and never before had anything occurred to keep her from the morning meal. He fumed and fretted about it, and could talk of nothing else during the breakfast.

“We must find something to get rid of the pests!” he declared impatiently once or twice.

“I have never seen or heard one,” observed Ellen.

“Last night I could scarcely sleep myself,” he went on, not heeding her interruption—“there were such noises in the next room. Of course it was rats. I wonder it did not strike me at the time.”

“More likely you heard Mrs. Priolo moving about.”

“It comes to the same thing. The rats disturbed her, and consequently she disturbed me.”

“I am very sorry you did not sleep well; and you need a good night’s rest always. Shall I read to you after breakfast? You say that sends you to sleep.”

He assented, and for nearly an hour she read aloud to him; but this morning her voice had lost its soporific influ-



ence, or else his nerves were in too irritable a state to be easily soothed.

Then Mrs. Priolo came down, looking much as usual in spite of the air of invalidism that she had adopted, and the subject of the rats was resumed.

"I'm sure I don't know what is to be done," said Mr. Bowyer, hopelessly.

"A rat-trap is the only thing I can think of. That is a very slow way of getting rid of them; but what else can any one suggest?"

Mrs. Priolo looked at Ellen as she spoke, and, wearied of the discussion, the girl answered somewhat impatiently—

"Why not lay down poison?"

"Is that practicable? What sort of poison is used?"

"Arsenic, I suppose"—wondering a little at the house-keeper's asking for information from her.

"I wonder whether it would be possible to get it?"

"Why not?" said Mr. Bowyer. "I will write a note to the chemist at Greathaven, and you shall go in yourself."

"That seems easily managed; and of course it is quite safe since Miss Warde recommends it. For my part, I don't care for meddling with such a dangerous thing as poison; but then I'm an old fogy." Then, changing her tone with the subject, she said, cheerily, "What about the letters this morning? Were there any?"

At the same moment the gate closed, and the postman came along the path.

There were two letters—one for Mrs. Priolo and one for Ellen Warde.

It was the first that had ever come to Ellen, but she felt no doubt whence it was, even if the large bold handwriting and the device of a London club on the thick square envelope had not told her. Blushing violently, she took it from the man.

"Who is your correspondent, Ellen?"



“I—I have not read it yet,” she answered, evasively; then, after a moment’s hesitation, during which she was fingering it nervously, she left the room with the letter still unopened in her hand.

Mr. Bowyer’s gaze followed her inquisitively.

“Who can have written to her?” he asked Mrs. Priolo.

“It’s either from the colonel or his son. The postmark was London, and they’re both there now, I hear.”

“What could they have to write about?” he persisted, with a restless curiosity that had become habitual to him of late.

“Young ladies will have their secrets, which it’s no good prying into,” laughed Mrs. Priolo. “Miss Warde is more inclined to make mysteries of nothing than most.”

The invalid looked annoyed, whether at her remark or his niece’s uncommunicativeness she could not tell. Opening her own letter, she became apparently engrossed in its contents. From time to time ejaculations broke from her which were calculated to arouse Mr. Bowyer’s attention, and did not fail in their intent.

“Have you anything very interesting there?” he asked, at length.

“It’s a shocking story—it would only distress you to hear it,” she said.

But, when he still displayed a keen desire to know all about it, she told him with apparent reluctance. A woman she had known some years before had come to a violent end. She was a widow, and well-to-do; her husband had been a wholesale cheese-monger in a large way of business, and had left her all his money free of control to do with as she chose.”

“And of course she made ducks and drakes of it at once,” put in Mr. Bowyer, with a compassionate sneer.

“No, indeed she did not; a better woman of business I never wish to see. She actually increased her income after her husband’s death.”



“A miser! With women it is always one extreme or the other.”

“Nothing of the sort. It would have been better for her if she had been close. A more charitable soul never breathed; had it not been so, she would have been alive now.”

“How was it then?”

“Well, it was this way. It was a practice of hers to visit the prisons and penitentiaries—and a deal of good is done in that way, I can well believe; but there is such a thing as going too far, even in the right direction, and to take a girl who had already at the age of nineteen been committed for extensive thefts and suspected of complicity in other worse crimes—to take such a one into her own house was nothing short of madness, I should say.”

“And—and what was the end of it?”

The question was asked because some observation seemed to be expected, not because any doubt was in his mind as to the reply. Inwardly Mr. Bowyer felt a shrewd suspicion that this story was being told him to point a moral, though he had neither reason nor proof to give for his belief, and therefore could not say so.

“It only shows there’s neither good nor gratitude to be got out of these wretches. It’s just as if, when once they’ve begun to go down-hill, they can’t even stop themselves, let alone turn round and go up again. This girl was loaded with presents and treated like a daughter—nothing was spared in fact, for my friend hoped to prove by her example that these criminals could be reclaimed by care and kindness. Poor soul, she was a martyr to her faith! When the girl had been with her about a year, the poor lady was persuaded to make a will, leaving all her property to this nameless waif who had so effectually managed to worm herself into her good graces. She was foolish enough to tell the girl what she had done—”



An impressive pause, which Mr. Bowyer broke into by asking abruptly—

“Did you know this before to-day?”

The housekeeper met his gaze without flinching.

“I knew the beginning of it, of course; but the end is only told now in this”—tapping lightly the letter in her hand.

“Go on with the story.”

“It’s a week ago since they found the poor woman murdered in her bed. So craftily was it managed that no suspicion seemed to attach to the girl, and her guilt might never have been discovered had not her antecedents been known. However, it’s brought home to her now, and will be a warning, I hope, to others.”

Mr. Bowyer remained doggedly mute. Whether the story was true or not, he was sure that it had been told for his benefit, and naturally resented it. He was a man who liked to go his own way unquestioned, and, having once adopted a course, never deviated from it.

This he thought Mrs. Priolo might have known, and felt angry with her—so angry that the doubt began to assail him whether the whole story was not invented on account of her dislike and distrust of Ellen Warde. He would have given anything to ask to read the letter himself, but the request would have implied an insult he hesitated to inflict, while, even if what she had told him was true, there might be other things she would not care for him to see, so the refusal which he would almost certainly get would not necessarily convict her.

“What a happy thing it is,” Mrs. Priolo went on, “that we none of us know the time and the manner of our death! Now that poor woman, a week ago, felt satisfied—satisfied as you and I feel now—that she would die in her own bed of old age or ordinary illness. Certainly the last person she would have suspected of raising a hand



against her was the outcast she had taken to herself and treated as her own child."

Against his will a creepy sensation very like fear was stealing over her hearer. Striving to fight against it, he lost his head, and said, excitedly—

"Why do you say all this to me? What have I to do with it?"

Mrs. Priolo's expression of innocent surprise was inimitable as she raised her widely opened eyes to his face.

"It was you that insisted on my telling the story! You will do me the justice to remember that I hesitated, knowing that anything like that would be sure to shock you in your present weak state of health. Of course, if you wish to be treated as an invalid only, and not a responsible person, at another time I will refuse to gratify your curiosity."

"I wish to be treated fairly and openly."

"Have I ever done otherwise," she asked, with dignity.

"You act according to your lights, I dare say; but women's ways are not men's ways. We attack an enemy face to face—we don't stab him in the dark!"

"Why, really, Mr. Bowyer, I fail to understand you! Who is talking of enemies and stabbing?"—with an indulgent smile that drove him to a further indiscretion.

He half raised himself from the chair, and, glaring at her fiercely, said, in a voice that he endeavored in vain to render calm and steady—

"Do you mean to say that you meant no reflection on my—on Ellen Warde—that what you told me was not intended to undermine my confidence in her?"

Mrs. Priolo rose and pushed him back gently into his chair.

"My dear sir, you are overtired and upset, or you would not say such things. If it were not so, I should begin to conjecture— But there—it is all nonsense! What on earth could Miss Warde, your niece, have in common with



a wretch rescued from a prison—a murderess? You have been talking wildly, and I must insist upon your resting now. No, no—don't say anything more; I declare I will not listen. Lie back and close your eyes, or I won't answer for the consequences."

The old lawyer, shrewd as he had been considered in his profession, was now no match for the wily woman whose wit was opposed to his. Furious at his own maladroitness, he could but follow her suggestion and take refuge in silence as his only safety. But he felt his defeat bitterly, and it required all the housekeeper's cleverness and tact to restore his self-esteem and win him back to good humor with herself. That she succeeded at all was a strong proof of the influence she was gaining over him day by day.

While all this took place below, Ellen was kneeling beside the open window of her room upstairs.

The fresh autumn air swept in and lifted her short curls, cooling her hot face as she opened the letter that had come at last. Its first perusal disappointed her a little—without reason she confessed, with self-upbraiding—for why should she have expected more from him, or as much? It was a kindly letter, and a friendly one. Anything beyond would have been fruitless, unwelcome even, she told herself, with a touch of hauteur; then, raising it from the ground, to which it had fluttered from her hand, she read it through again.

"MY DEAR MISS WARDE,—Your note was forwarded to me only this morning, and I hasten to assure you that you have nothing to fear from me. Anything you have ever told me I consider sacred, and will guard more jealously than any secret of my own. I only wish I might take the whole burden on myself, and leave you free.

"A telegram from Charlie, reminding me that it was his birthday and begging me to spend it with him, took



me away quite unexpectedly. For the first time I had forgotten it—and this his coming of age too! We are too new to the county to celebrate it in the usual way, as I should have liked to do. A few days at most will see me back. Will you believe that I am already anxious to exchange the gayeties of town for the quietude of the Abbey and the privilege of an occasional visit to the Dower House? I should be glad if my boy could accompany me, but I feel it is too much to ask of him yet. I hope that Mr. Bowyer's health is improving, and that you yourself are well. Until we meet, which will be very soon, believe me,

Your sincere friend,

“GEORGE SEVERN.

“P.S.—I have become quite a frequenter of theaters, which for certain reasons I view now with different eyes. If anything, I have gone to an opposite extreme, and am inclined to fancy that every woman who has trod the stage is what I know one to be.”

This time she read between the lines, and was conscious of an under-current of tenderness that sent the blood coursing through her veins and made her eyelids droop, though none could see what her eyes might have betrayed.

Something told her that he cared for her; and the knowledge caused her a keen delight, even if no good might ever come of it—only sorrow. She scarcely understood herself, and was afraid to analyze the new sensations that were rising in her heart and filling it to the exclusion of all else; but this she knew—the old idol which in her inexperienced girlhood she had erected was displaced, while another, indistinct and shadowy as yet, was slowly rising in its stead and taking the form, the features, the individuality of George Severn. In his letter he had signed himself only her friend; but she felt with a subtle passionate pleasure that made her oblivious of the barrier which existed that he was gradually becoming something more.



Friendship was a pleasant thing and sweet; but love was far, far sweeter. She was a mere child in the ways of the world when—unwisely—she gave away her heart unasked, though not entirely unsought. Now she was a woman, and with a woman's unerring intuition knew that the man whose letter was in her hand—now pressed closely to her bosom, now to her lips—was her lover, and beloved.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

“HERE’S a letter from Severn, Ellen; he’s back, and coming to see us this afternoon. Some Australian—a Mr. Wray, I read it—is with him; and he wants to bring him too, if I am well enough to receive a stranger.”

“And are you well enough?” asked the girl, bending over the flowers she was arranging to hide what she knew was written on her face in scarlet.

“I am about the same as usual; but a talk with some one from the old country will never harm me. It will be like a breath of Australian air, keen but exhilarating—not like this cold dampness that is beginning now.”

“I wish you would go back to Australia.”

“Why? Would you go too?”

“That is impossible, you know; and, oh”—with a slight shiver—“I have no desire to return! With you it is different—you are homesick, and the climate suited you; it pains me terribly to know that you are staying here only on my account.”

“I was ill there too; besides, after all, this is my native country.”

She looked at him sorrowfully, but said no more, having urged it on him so often in vain. Then, taking the flowers from the bowl where she had placed them, she put them in again—this time more carefully, for some one would be there to see.

The little sitting-room looked its best when Mr. Bowyer



entered about four o'clock, having been to his room to lie down for an hour or so, the better to enjoy the treat in store for him. It had been the subject of his conversation all day. A visit from Severn was always welcome, and this time doubly so, since he was bringing with him some one who could talk to him of the old well-known places and habits which custom had made dear.

He glanced round approvingly.

"How cozy it is; and a little fire is very acceptable, though the month is October! It is getting colder every day. It is wonderful how luxuriant the flowers are still. Where did you get all these?"

"A basket came from the Abbey as usual, and some are from our own garden."

"And you actually found it in your heart to pick them!"

He spoke rallying, for he knew her love for flowers, and that she never willingly gathered one. It struck him suddenly that perhaps young Severn was coming with his father, and it was in his honor that she had made these preparations. His gaze wandered to herself.

She was looking very bright, very beautiful, he thought. Some inward excitement had brought a color to her cheeks and a wondrous light into her eyes. Her lips were parted in anticipation, her movements were full of elasticity as she flitted hither and thither, touching first one thing, then another, to make them show to the best advantage; but the gown she was wearing was certainly not a gala one. It was the same that she wore every day—a black velveteen with crape upon it, grown brown and rusty-looking from wear.

"Have you no nicer frock?" he asked her. "Don't you think you might cease to wear such deep mourning? It will excite remark."

"I shall never wear anything but black, I think," she answered, gravely; then, conscious of the depressing effect of her speech, she took some Maréchal Niel buds from a



vase and pinned them in the lace at her throat. "Does that look better?"

Mr. Bowyer muttered something unintelligible which she guessed to be complimentary from its tone; and a mirror that hung opposite set any doubt she might still have had at rest. It reflected the slim figure in its graceful poise, the fair face that the dark dingy garb made to seem fairer still, the bright hair which was of even a deeper, more golden yellow than that of the roses she wore. A richer and brighter gown might have seemed more appropriate to but could not have enhanced her beauty.

Voices were heard outside; the next moment Colonel Severn entered; and, having greeted Mr. Bowyer warmly, and Ellen with an involuntary *empressement* of which she could not but be conscious, he turned to indicate his friend.

"Mr. Weare—a countryman of yours," he said.

A momentary pause, during which Mr. Bowyer was wondering where he had seen before the dark good-looking face and tall slight figure of the young man introduced.

"We met about a year ago, when I was on my way back from India," continued Colonel Severn; "and I was lucky enough to come across him again while up in town this time."

The stranger interposed.

"I think the luck was all on my side," he said, in a voice that, pleasant as it was, struck two of the hearers with dismay. To Mr. Bowyer it was perfectly familiar, though he could not remember where he had heard it last. "The colonel saved me from drowning when coming home; and really I believe he has saved me from something nearly as bad now. London, to a stranger who knows none of the celebrities or institutions, is one of the dreariest places in the world."

"I agree with you, I think," remarked the old lawyer; "or perhaps it is the sociability of colonial society that



makes life in England strange at first. Find a chair for Mr. Weare, colonel, and one for yourself. I am an invalid still, you see."

"I am sorry for that—I had hoped to find you getting stronger and acclimatized," said Colonel Severn, placing a chair for his friend.

"It is a matter of climate, I suppose; but don't let us talk of my ailments—the subject is getting uninteresting, even to me, who possess more than my share of invalid's egotism. Tell me how the colonel came to save your life, Mr. Weare?"

"Well, this is how it came about. I happened to be on the P. and O. steamer in which he was coming to England. I had been seriously ill, and change of air and new associations had been recommended; but I am a miserable sailor, and for some days was the worse rather than the better for my voyage. The weather was very rough, but I positively could not stay below, and, in spite of remonstrances, spent most of my time on deck clinging to whatever I could. One night the cold was so intense that my fingers lost all power; a big sea washed over us, and—I knew no more till I found myself, drenched through and fearfully weak, in my cabin. The wave must have knocked me senseless, for until I was told I did not even know that I had been overboard, and saved only by Colonel Severn's pluck and skill."

"Nonsense, man! Any one would have done the same, only I chanced to be the nearest, and saw what had happened first."

"So you say; but I don't believe another soul on board would have ventured into that raging sea on the chance of saving a stranger's life."

"Have you never heard," asked Mr. Bowyer, "that it is a dangerous thing to rescue a man from drowning? There is a superstitious idea that the act recoils on yourself, and is your own undoing."



“Oh, if we stayed to listen to the teachings of superstition!” smiled Colonel Severn.

“Perhaps it might be well if we did sometimes,” returned Mr. Bowyer. “How often it seems as though a benefit conferred engendered a feeling of ill-will rather than gratitude! And is it not the one whom we prefer above all others, or have saved from some disaster, who has the power—and often the inclination—to hurt us most?”

“I hope it is not so. Nay, I am sure it can not be,” answered the young man warmly.

Mr. Bowyer had spoken bitterly, yet even as the words fell from his lips he knew that the thoughts they clothed emanated from Mrs. Priolo’s brain—not his own. He dared not glance in Ellen’s direction, lest he should meet her reproachful gaze.

When the stranger had first spoken, Ellen had shrunk back into the shadow of a dark curtain, clasping its heavy folds convulsively for support. Her brain was in a whirl—her heart beat so violently that it hurt her; but the pain was not so great that it could not be increased. Each word of Mr. Bowyer’s last speech stabbed her like the sharp incision of a knife; yet her very suffering gave her momentary strength.

Wearily she crept away, her exit unnoticed by any one save George Severn, who had watched her anxiously from the first, wondering what it was that had caused her such evident distress. The eyes of love are keen; and Severn had ceased to deceive himself in that respect some time back. He knew why he was so eager to serve her, why he would gladly throw his life and fortune away if by so doing he could save her from any pain.

“I wonder if it is true,” mused Mr. Bowyer, “that a drowning man sees every action of his life pass before him? It must add to the horror of the death if that is true.”



“You are taking it for granted that only one’s evil deeds rise before one,” said Severn.

Mr. Bowyer still looked questioningly at the young man who had passed through the experience. He answered now gravely—

“You forget I was senseless while in the water, and so was spared that at least.”

“Yes; I suppose few of us are so free from remorse as to face such a panorama unmoved.”

“None, I should say,” put in Mr. Weare quickly. “Has it never struck you what whited sepulchers we all are—some more, some less? When one comes to consider the number of criminal mysteries that remain unraveled, it is only to be supposed that we have met some of the guilty ones in friendly converse. The pretty girl I took in to dinner a few nights ago may be a murderess, for all I know; and that young fellow, your son’s friend, who impressed you so favorably that same evening, colonel, may be an undetected thief or forger.”

“Rather unlikely, all the same,” smiled Severn.

“I am suggesting possibilities rather than probabilities, I admit; but it is my firm conviction that in every one of us the capacity for crime is lying dormant. The development is a mere matter of temptation, opportunity, and chance.”

“You are a fatalist,” was the half-contemptuous reply.

George Severn thought his friend was talking wildly. Intensely truthful himself and frank in all his dealings, a more single-minded man than Colonel Severn could not exist. Though not denying the reality of crime in the abstract, it was very difficult to make him believe in the vice of any one in particular.

Mr. Bowyer, for whom the terrible had always an attraction, was deeply interested, and did not attempt to disguise the fact.

“Do you mean,” he said, eagerly, “that you have



known a case in which such a person as you describe has mixed freely with his fellow-beings unsuspected?"

"I have such a case in my mind now."

"But then immunity for a time does not mean immunity forever."

"Of course not. My argument is that some, not all, escape detection."

"It is dreadful to contemplate!"—shuddering. "Let us change the subject to one less grewsome. Ellen, will you give us some tea and call for lights?"

"Miss Warde left the room a few minutes ago," answered Colonel Severn. "Shall I ring the bell?"

"Thank you. And now, Mr. Weare, let us talk about Australia for a time. What a country it is! I wonder why we English still cling to home when nearly every other climate is better than our own?"

"A sort of obstinacy, I suppose; or it may be one is freer and more independent in England, and can go one's own way unquestioned."

"You mean one can be lost in a crowd."

"I think the crowd is an advantage in itself."

"From what part of Australia do you come?" asked Mr. Bowyer abruptly, and received the brief reply—

"Sydney."

In a moment it flashed across the old man's mind where he had seen his visitor before. He was none other than that Gerald Weare whose bride had been taken from him in so horrible a fashion a month before his wedding-day, and for whose sake Elaine Warrington was supposed to have committed a crime.

He looked round nervously, then, remembering that Ellen had left the room, half rose with the intention of following her and putting her on her guard, if indeed she had not already taken fright.

At the same moment a shrill cry was heard outside, and Mrs. Priolo threw open the door.



“Here’s Miss Ellen lying on the ground in a dead faint!” she cried. “Whatever can have happened?”

It was Severn who made the first move to cross over to her side. She had fallen senseless across the door-way. He knelt down and raised her head on to his arm. Mr. Bowyer appeared helpless with dismay, but Gerald Weare came near and looked down at her with an expression of somewhat stereotyped pity.

“Have you no restoratives?” asked Severn, sharply, of the housekeeper.

Before she could reply, an involuntary exclamation from the lips of the stranger startled them both.

It was only the ejaculation of a name, as though he had suddenly recognized the senseless woman at his feet; but it was not the name by which either of them had known her.

Mr. Bowyer jumped up from his seat as though electrified, and dragged himself slowly to the scene of action, not knowing what to do for the best. Mrs. Priolo retained possession of all her faculties.

“You’ve known the poor young lady before,” she observed to Mr. Weare, in the bland tones which Colonel Severn had lately learned to distrust. “Don’t you think we had better place her on the sofa? And then I’ll run and get some brandy and the sal-volatile from Mr. Bowyer’s room.”

But Mr. Bowyer interfered. He was determined that Ellen should not return to consciousness before them all, and perhaps betray herself in her first bewilderment. Violently agitated as he was, he managed to express clearly his desire that the girl should be taken to her own room at once.

Obediently the colonel gathered her in his arms and bore her up the narrow stairs, wishing the distance greater still in spite of her dead-weight—indeed the wild elation



that filled him at the close contact precluded all idea of fatigue.

She was lying across his breast, her soft golden curls sometimes brushing his cheek as he bent over her solicitously, and he could feel the faint beating of her heart. Whatever of sorrow or disappointment the future held in store, it would always possess for him the consolation of memory. Like the page who once, and only once, kissed the red lips of Schön Rohtraut, he forgot, in the rapture of the moment, the barren years that stretched before him. Though a secret in her life prevented her ever marrying, though she loved some one else, and though, even if these difficulties could be surmounted, there would still be the impossibility of giving to his son a step-mother where he fain would have found a wife, still the present moment was his own—nothing could rob him of the recollection of this wild delight.

The measured tread of Mrs. Priolo as she followed him upstairs recalled him in some degree to himself. She had lingered behind a moment to bestow a searching glance on this visitor whose coming had created such a disturbance. For a moment only was she puzzled; then, remembering the sketch in Ellen's portfolio, she knew that by some strange chance—a fatality it might be called—the man for whom she had so deeply sinned had once more crossed the path of the fugitive from justice.

How would this affect her plans? Would he denounce her at once, or would faint-hearted compassion cause him to forego the revenge to which he was entitled? Time would show; but the housekeeper felt pretty sure that in the end her cause, the cause of might and right, would triumph, and with tolerable complacence set about restoring to Ellen Warde the consciousness of which for a time she had been mercifully deprived.



## CHAPTER XVII.

RETURNED to the Abbey, George Severn and his guest, after dinner, smoked their cigars in almost absolute silence, each being too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice the abstraction of the other. Of the two the colonel seemed the more perturbed. He was wondering where and how Miss Warde and Mr. Weare had known each other, and what would be the result of their chance meeting. Another thing puzzled him. It was certainly not a surname that had escaped Weare's lips on first recognition, but it also was not "Ellen;" it had a longer, softer sound. He thought it must have been "Elaine."

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable—  
Elaine, the lily-maid of Astolat,"

he quoted softly to himself. The name suited her so well, with her pale sweet face and secret sorrow; but what right had this young fellow to call her by it?

The subject of that afternoon's incident was not broached until Mr. Weare said, as they stood up to say good-night—

"By the bye, what was the name of the old gentleman we visited to-day?"

"Mr. Bowyer. He practised as a lawyer in Australia, I believe."

"And—and the young lady?"

"She is Miss Ellen Warde, his niece."

"Have they been here any time?"

"About six months. Good-night," said the colonel, curtly, closing the conversation.

He had no wish to give further information about Ellen Warde which might or might not be used to her disadvantage; and yet it would be suspicious and not what she herself would most probably desire were he to withhold facts which any inhabitant of the village could supply.



The next morning Colonel Severn looked older and more sallow than usual, feeling unrefreshed after a sleepless night. He found his visitor down before him, and pacing the terrace in front of the house, apparently having passed as restless a night as the colonel himself. However, a little color came into Mr. Weare's cheeks, and he forced an expression of interest into his haggard eyes when he saw he was no longer alone, and immediately began, in a disconnected, incoherent manner utterly unlike his ordinary languid indifference, to discuss the laying-out of the garden.

They were in the middle of a conversation which they endeavored in vain to render animated when the undergardener returned with his empty basket from the Dower House.

Colonel Severn's quick sight immediately detected a letter in the man's hand—indeed he had half expected that Ellen would write to him that day to claim his promised aid. He made a hasty movement forward, and had snatched it impatiently before the man had time to explain that it was not for him, but Mr. Weare. Relinquishing it at once, he still could not but see that the direction was in Ellen's handwriting, and a sharp pang of jealousy made him unable to do more than stammer out an apology. Then he turned abruptly on his heel and went in-doors.

Gerald Weare however showed no elation—indeed the anxious expression on his face became intensified as he broke the seal and read the letter. When he came to the end of it, he tore the paper into shreds, and followed his host into the house.

No allusion was made to the letter during breakfast; and when the meal was over Colonel Severn asked his companion what he would like to do.

“Not that I have many amusements to offer you,” he added, ruefully; “but we might ride or drive into Great-haven, or knock over a few rabbits and hares, if you care to walk with your gun.”



“Would you mind,” asked Gerald Weare, deprecatingly, “if I went somewhere on my own account this morning? There is something I ought to do—something that has turned up rather unexpectedly, in fact.”

“My dear fellow, don’t explain,” interrupted the colonel, hastily; “I wish you to do exactly as you please—exactly as you would do if you were in your own house. We shall meet at luncheon, I dare say.”

He helped himself to a cigar, and pushed the box toward his guest; but it remained unnoticed for awhile. Gerald Weare was deep in thought, from which he aroused himself only to remember how strange his conduct must appear in the colonel’s eyes.

“It is more than good of you to let me come and go unquestioned like this!” he exclaimed. “It is hospitality in its truest and widest sense. The fact is, Miss Warde and I are not strangers; we have met before, and—”

“And you naturally wish to see her again?”

“Yes—that is just it,” he answered, availing himself of the suggestion. “I will walk over there now, if you will excuse me.”

He rose and, with a nod and smile of farewell, left the room. George Severn remained alone, moodily smoking. He understood at last. This was the man Elaine loved—he called her “Elaine” in his thoughts already—the name suited her so well, it became familiar at once—it never entered his head to doubt that her love was returned; at any time he would have scouted the idea that it was possible she should cherish an unrequited passion. This was the reason why she had not appealed to him, why she would never need his aid again. There was some one now upon whom it was natural she should lean—some one younger and better-looking and more suited to her in every way; but would he—could he ever love her half so well?

With a half-smothered groan Severn rose and flung away the cigar he had already suffered to die out. Maddened by



the thought that already probably they were together, and all the misery of the days during which they had been separated forgotten in the blissful present, he snatched up his hat and went out, with no destination in view, only with the settled intention of avoiding the neighborhood of the Dower House.

He walked on rapidly, his eyes fixed upon the ground, scarcely knowing in which direction he was going, when suddenly, passing through a narrow lane, he stumbled, and, instinctively looking up to see whither he was walking, he saw a little way in front of him the flutter of a petticoat. A second glance showed him that the woman was Mrs. Priolo; and something in her action struck him as so peculiar that he stood still and watched her.

She was bent nearly double, creeping on slowly in the shelter of a hedge. As it was not to be supposed she was stalking any game, the only conclusion he could come to was that she was playing the spy. But on whom?

In the center of a large meadow full of grazing cattle, under the shadow of an old oak, stood Ellen Warde and Mr. Weare. There was nothing lover-like in their attitude, he could see; but they were talking earnestly, and evidently of something they did not wish to be overheard. Was the housekeeper trying to discover their secret? Quickly yet quietly he walked on, and laid his hand firmly on her shoulder.

“What are you doing here?”

There was a suppressed scream as the woman, rising from her bent position, twisted her neck round to see who was her assailant. When she found it was the colonel, her face cleared a little. What she had been watching so intently would surely be no pleasant sight to him.

“Sweethearting,” she whispered, meaningly. “They have made rapid strides in their acquaintance, if they met for the first time yesterday.”

“Whether they have known each other before or not is



no business of yours!" declared the colonel, sternly. "You will come with me to the Dower House at once. I intend to ask Mr. Bowyer if he allows his housekeeper to act the spy upon his niece."

"She's no more his niece than I am! She's—"

But her communicativeness was stopped at once by a gesture, and Severn's uplifted hand pointed out the way that she was to take.

"Very well, I'm ready enough to go if you like; but are you sure"—maliciously—"you're doing her a good turn? I don't want to make mischief; but, if I'm forced to speak, I'll say out all I know."

An expression of doubt on her hearer's face encouraged her to proceed.

"Why, you don't think," she went on, boldly, "that Mr. Bowyer would keep her another moment in his house if he heard all I could tell?"

"I think you are a very wicked woman!" exclaimed Severn.

"What—for watching those two just now? Why, all women are interested in a bit of love-making; curiosity is no sin! Miss Warde and I are good friends enough if you will only leave us alone."

Severn bit his lip and tugged at his dark mustache in deep perplexity. She might be speaking the truth—it might injure Ellen were he to insist upon bringing this before Mr. Bowyer; being so utterly in the dark, it was almost impossible for him to act without the fear of acting wrongly, and yet it went against the grain to let this scheming wretch go unpunished.

"After all, they're doing no harm," went on Mrs. Priolo, who, having recovered her self-possession, could see that she had the advantage now, and thought she might as well be revenged for the fright he had given her. She's fond of him, no doubt, for she has kept some flowers he gave her years ago, and has painted a picture of him too."



"Silence, woman! Go!" thundered out the colonel; then, as, cowed by his anger, she turned obediently and went, he too walked away in the opposite direction, smiling bitterly to himself.

What changes love had worked in him! He, the equable self-contained man, had actually become melodramatic in his wrath; even in his young days the blood had not flowed so tempestuously through his veins—nay, he was inclined to think that this was his real youth now, or at least the St. Martin's summer of his life. Never before had his pulses beaten so madly as they had lately at sight of Ellen Warde—indeed sometimes his feelings, which once had been perfectly under control, overmastered him, as in the present instance.

He was half blinded now with passion as he strode along, and a jealous fancy pictured the love-scene that was being enacted even then. Yet a half hope that reason could not stifle lay deeply hidden in his heart that so great a love as his was not born and developed without a purpose; and this saved him from utter despair. It was only the beginning of the drama, after all; he must possess his soul in patience to the end.

Would it have comforted him could he have been an unobserved spectator of what took place at the meeting which circumstances had prevented from being so secret as had been intended?

Elaine had arrived first, and stood leaning against the gnarled trunk of the old oak, waiting for the other. She was as white as a sheet and trembling in every limb when at last Gerald Weare arrived. Nervously she held out her hand. The action was mechanical and the outcome of custom; but she wished she had not made the movement when he stopped, as though anxious to keep her at a distance.

"You won't even shake hands with me?" she cried, excitedly.



“I would rather not”—in a cold, hard voice. He was almost as agitated as she, but managed to maintain a semblance of composure. “It would be merely an outward ceremony, and I—I have a great horror of pretense,” he said, after a slight pause. “To neither of us can this unexpected meeting be anything but painful.”

“It is very strange that the whole world is not big enough to hide in”—dreamily.

“What made you choose this place?” asked he.

“It was Mr. Bowyer’s idea. He said that I should be safer in an English village than traveling about and meeting different people every day.”

“He was right—quite right. It was the merest chance—or would you call it destiny?—that brought me here.”

“You won’t betray me?”—eagerly.

“I? No. Do you think me such a cur? Heaven knows I have no desire to revive the past—I only want to forget! Do you know”—in awed low tones—“when I saw you lying there senseless in that dimly lighted passage, I thought for a moment you were Ada.”

“Risen from the dead?”

“Yes, risen from the dead to comfort and console me—the Ada who loved me, telling me so in artless, childish fashion every hour; not the Ada who loved another, and was marrying me only for my money.”

A low cry escaped the girl’s pale lips; she sprung forward and caught hold of his arm.

“You know all that? Who told you?”

“I discovered it for myself. You may be sure no one else had the common honesty to open my eyes.”

“But when—when—and how?”

“What does it matter?” he asked, roughly shaking off her hand. “Soon enough to prevent my breaking my heart when—when she died.”

Elaine shuddered. The subject was too terrible a one to be pursued.



"I begged her so often to be true to herself and you!" she whispered at last.

He stood over her and looked down straight into her eyes.

"Do you know they used to tell me that if—if I had not sought Ada I might have won Elaine? I wonder if that was true?"

White and silent, she returned his gaze as though spell-bound, as though uncertain herself whether it had been so or not, and trying to read what was in his face.

He laughed mirthlessly, and turned away his head so that he saw only the acres and acres of green fields that spread before him and the calm blue sky that stretched above. Far away in the dim perspective rose the spire of the church at Greathaven and the tall chimneys with their columns of dark smoke.

"If we could only see into the future, how differently we should shape our lives!" he said, presently, tossing his head and pushing back his mustache from his lips, a gesture she remembered in old times, when every act of his was noted by her and admired.

"Perhaps it is better as it is," she suggested, timidly.

"Better as it is? How can you say so? What could be worse than the dark tragedy which has spoiled our lives? And I might have won happiness with you. Ah, if we had only known! And Ada might have been alive and happy, too, poor child!"

"Oh, hush!" she cried, in agony; and, leaning wearily against the tree, she sobbed aloud.

"Does it hurt you so? How strange! To me the pain is deadened, or at least I have grown accustomed to it—I believe one could grow accustomed to any horrible thought by not avoiding it."

"You forget," she said, in a harsh, strained voice, "it is different for me. I was suspected of—of—" She could not finish her sentence; though no one was within hearing, she dared not put the terrible ghastly fact into words.



“But you escaped,” he remarked, understanding what she meant.

“Yes, I escaped from prison, from trial, perhaps from death; but, oh, in thought I suffer all still, and shall until—”

This time he did not attempt to complete her sentence or answer it. The whole thing was too sad, too terrible to discuss. The end seemed far away, if indeed there could ever be an end. He thought there was only one solution to the problem—death.

“Why did you ask me to come here?” he inquired, at length.

“Because I wanted to beg your silence. An incautious word from you might betray me; and I have an enemy here who is on the watch to make use of anything against me.”

“Not the colonel?”

A deep blush suffused her cheeks, and she shook her head. Ever since she had been face to face with her old idol she had been realizing more clearly every moment that he had indeed fallen and never could be replaced in his old high position. His faults were so plainly visible to her now—his nervous womanish way, the selfishness of which she had always realized, but which seemed more glaring in contrast with the generosity and thoughtfulness of her other lover. Gerald Weare had never spared her—not when he had led her to believe nearly two years before that she and not Ada was the woman he loved; not now, when he talked so lightly of things which he knew must touch her to the quick. But, blinded though he had always been by conceit and love of self, he could not fail to see the change in her expression.

“I see it is not he,” he said, bitterly. “Have I fallen on a love-story unawares?” Though he had never loved her, it hurt his vanity to think that she should have ceased



to care for him, and he felt compelled to make her suffer in return.

She flashed an indignant contemptuous glance at him, and then replied with sorrowful dignity that touched his shallow sympathy at once—

“There is no question of such a thing now, nor ever. I shall live and die alone.”

“Child, don’t look so despairing! You are safe now; and, if ever you are in danger again, appeal to me. There is something I know about that fatal night—something important which I believe would help you, perhaps clear you altogether;” then, meeting her eager, curious gaze, he added, impressively, “Remember only you and I as yet know of the existence of that other, presumably a jealous lover.”

“You want to transfer suspicion to him?”—sharply.

“I want to remove it from you. There is no body of men so open to conviction, so easily hoodwinked, as an impaneled jury. I wonder how they reconcile to their consciences all the mistakes they make.” Taking out a little pocket-book, he wrote a few words on a blank leaf, tore it out, and gave it to her. “There are the name and address of my bankers; anything directed there will always find me.”

She thanked him quietly.

“It is time I went back,” she said; “Mr. Bowyer always dines in the middle of the day, and will wonder if I am late.”

“Then we part again. This will be the last time, I think. I shall leave here at once—by this afternoon’s train if possible—and I don’t imagine, Elaine, our paths will ever cross in the future.”

“I hope not,” was in her heart, but nothing passed her lips.

He stood for a moment pushing back his dark mustache



and staring at her curiously; then, muttering a somewhat gruff farewell, he turned and walked away rapidly.

Ellen sighed wearily, and went in the other direction. She had known before that of which this interview had convinced her; still the certainty that the cause of so much love and sorrow was utterly unworthy struck her with a new and a keen pain. She had suffered so deeply on his account—more deeply than any one could ever know—and all her devotion was wasted, thrown away. It might have been so different!

It still wanted a few minutes to the dinner-hour as she entered the little garden and ran upstairs quickly to her room. Her first act when she reached it was to open the small tin box which she had carried about with her so long. Taking out the bunch of withered flowers—a tribute from Gerald Weare when as yet he was in doubt as to which of the two sisters he would favor with his affections—she flung it impetuously into the empty grate, then, applying a lighted match, watched it flare up brightly, and sink as suddenly into a heap of dust.

In spite of her impatient anger, she felt a pang—it was a volume in her life closed; what would the next contain? She felt very old, very sober, and wise with the wisdom that only sad experience can teach, as, having brushed her hair and washed the dust from her face and hands, she went down-stairs slowly, and so seemed to leave all the past behind her. Would the future be brighter? She felt no hope.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Colonel Severn returned from a walk which without his knowledge had extended for some miles, he found his guest had gone. He had returned, the servants told him, packed up his things, and driven away to the station in great haste, leaving a note behind which would, they suggested, probably explain his sudden departure.



The curiosity which was felt as to why he had gone so hurriedly and unexpectedly was not gratified by their master. Expressing no surprise at the news, he did not even open the letter which was placed in his hands until he was alone. Then he read as follows:—

“MY DEAR COLONEL,—You will think it of a piece with the rest of my strange conduct that, having come to stay a week with you, I should go at the expiration of a day. I believe you will do me the justice to believe that this is from necessity, not choice. If you wish to know more, perhaps Miss Ellen Warde will tell you. It is on her account I have gone—”

Here Severn paused a moment. Was it possible that he too had been sent away—that this girl would not be wooed from her mysterious lonely life even when she loved the wooer? What firm resolve must be concealed in that delicate frame, and how serious must be the secret that forced her to act so! Again he took up the letter and read on:

“My own inclination would have kept me here. From the first I was attracted by your strength of character and unselfishness, perhaps because they were the attributes I lacked myself. I, who have ever been the sport of the winds, the slave of every idle fancy, and who have never hesitated to sacrifice another for myself, can yet appreciate such virtues in another.

“Then you saved my life—a worthless life, it is true, and valueless even to myself since I had lost all that makes life worth the living—still you risked your own to save it, and I have not forgotten that. I never shall.

“Don’t believe what that morbid old Australian said last night. It is not true—I know it by my own feelings. I would die sooner than work harm to you; I would die—it would be only paying a debt—to secure you anything on



which your life depended. Believe that, and test me if occasion should demand. I am protesting wildly and over romantically, you will say, but it is from the bottom of whatever heart I still possess. I esteem and admire you more than any man I ever knew. I should like to prove that and my gratitude some day.

“The horses are waiting, and horses must not be kept waiting, however melodramatic may be the situation. Good-bye! We may never meet again, but I hope you won’t forget one who will often remember your goodness, who, erratic and good for nothing as he may be, is still

“Your sincere well-wisher,

“GERALD WEARE.”

A strange letter, and characteristic of the writer, who was always inclined to take a theatrical attitude on the smallest provocation; yet Severn recognized the real earnestness of the feeling expressed, and believed something of what he professed, if not all. The selfishness of which the young fellow was himself conscious he had also seen; but he knew he was good-natured too, and had often traced to him a generous deed of which the doer seemed half ashamed.

Well, he was gone now, and the field was clear; yet the colonel had no hope of triumph in the future. He was beginning to understand that Ellen was capable of a strong resistance. If the man she loved could not move her, how could he hope to win her, for whom she felt only friendship, and even that of such short standing?

He had given up hoping, he told himself, but that should not prevent him from doing all he could for her. What merit would there be in serving if he had an idea of reward in the end? No; he would give all and ask nothing in return, proving his passion by acts, not empty words; so he must at least win her friendly esteem, if not her love.



Mrs. Priolo hurried back after her unexpected interview with the colonel, congratulating herself upon her escape and the ingenuity with which she had contrived it. How easily men were hoodwinked, especially when in love! How easily a woman could circumvent the cleverest of them!

Like many of her class, the housekeeper mistook what was merely low cunning for intelligence, and only regretted she had not developed it earlier in life; for brains combined with a pretty face, she reflected complacently, might rise to any eminence. Her success encouraged her to continue the course she had marked out for herself; and, though it was a dangerous game she proposed to play, she felt no fear as to the result. Overweening conceit stood her in place of the higher attribute of self-confidence; and avarice, seeing the golden prize ahead, was inclined to underrate the perils of the path that led to it. She knew enough of Mr. Bowyer's affairs to be aware that when he spoke of twenty thousand pounds as the half of his fortune he had estimated it at less than the real value. Its total must be at least sixty thousand—and all this might be her own! Might? Nay, would be if woman's wit had not lost its vaunted power!

It was therefore with some elation that she entered the little room where Mr. Bowyer was seated.

"What a long time you have been!" he began querulously, looking up from his paper.

"I thought Miss Ellen was with you, or I'd have hurried. Have you been alone all the time? I am so sorry!"

"Ellen is not down yet. Perhaps you had better go and see if she wants anything. Poor child, I am afraid she is in a weak state of health, or she would not have gone off into such a deep swoon! I am quite alarmed."

"I don't fancy there is much the matter with her now, at all events."

"Why do you say that?"



“Because I saw her, a couple of miles from here, talking to the gentleman who came last night.”

“Ah, indeed!” said Mr. Bowyer.

He was vexed that Ellen had not confided to him her intention of going to meet Gerald Weare. Of course she would tell him when she returned; but to be consulted after action was taken would be a very poor compliment indeed. It was injudicious of her thus to draw notice upon herself—indeed it was a species of ingratitude to himself as well, for, he having already risked so much in her behalf, she had no right to allow the risk to be increased. She ought not to have moved in the matter without his permission; or, if she chose to exercise her right of action, she might at least have asked his advice. He changed the subject quickly to hide his annoyance.

“Had you a successful visit to Greathaven? Did you get what you wanted?” he inquired.

“Yes; they have good shops. I shall go over again some day. The walk is really nothing—in this cold weather it does one good. Nine miles there and back, they call it; but, if you take the short cuts, I fancy it is barely six.”

“You will find the effects of it afterward, I expect. You should have driven, as I told you; there would have been no difficulty in hiring a trap. If I make up my mind to stay here, I must buy a little phaeton and pair of ponies for Ellen to drive.”

“That would be delightful! What a lucky girl she is, to be sure! By the bye, I got that stuff she recommended—the poison, you know.”

“Then I hope you will get some rest now. You’re looking quite fagged,” he said, kindly.

“I will have a good sleep this afternoon. I think perhaps I am a little tired, after all.”

“Of course you are; but you will never take my ad-



vice"—man-like, visiting the sins of the absent on the one at hand.

At that moment the door opened and Ellen entered in her ordinary morning-gown, presenting no sign, save the faint fresh color in her cheeks, that she had left the house.

"Good-morning," she said, gently.

Mr. Bowyer returned her greeting rather gruffly, and asked her if she was feeling better in a tone so palpably indifferent that her anxiety was aroused. Was he angry with her? Or was it only that he himself felt unwell and incapable just then of sympathizing with any one else?

"I am all right—but you?" she answered, inquiringly.

He muttered something that she could not hear; and, not liking to ask him to repeat what he had said, she stood in the center of the room, hesitating whether to stay there then or come in at another time when he was in a better humor. She had half intended to tell him who the stranger was who had visited them on the night before, and of the reason of her fainting-fit; but now, she decided, silence would be the kinder course. He was looking so ill and shaken himself, it would only upset him more; and he had borne enough on her account already. She had lost sight of the probability that he too might have recognized Mr. Weare, and, having no idea that Mrs. Priolo had been out that morning, she believed her own absence to be unsuspected. So while she stood debating *pros* and *cons*, the opportunity was lost.

Mrs. Priolo had left the room on the girl's first entrance, and now was heard calling her from down-stairs. A little surprised, Ellen obeyed the summons.

The housekeeper was in the kitchen, and had a packet in her hand. The housemaid was also standing there.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you, Miss Ellen; but it's this arsenic. I don't know how to use it."

"I am sure I don't," returned Ellen, rather angry at



the persistent way in which her knowledge on the subject of poisons was taken for granted.

“ Shall I put it down plain like this?”

“ You can if you like; but I should not think any rat would be so idiotic as to eat it so.”

“ You mean it should be mixed with something?”

“ Why, of course—any child might know that!”

The housekeeper's eyes gleamed vindictively, but she refrained from retort; she trusted to the future for her revenge.

“ I'm sorry to be so stupid; but I shall know another time,” she answered, with outward pleasantness, then turned to an open cupboard.

“ See—I'll put it on the top shelf out of reach for the present. Mary, mind you tell the cook what it is. Just look, Miss Ellen, in case Mr. Bowyer asks you to get him anything this afternoon. That's the sugar, and that's the salt; the arsenic is right out of the way at the back there. I declare it makes me quite nervous having such stuff in the house; but no one could make a mistake now.”

“ No, indeed, mum,” said the housemaid, visibly impressed.

Ellen, who could not help suspecting that the housekeeper was speaking with an object, remained silent, and presently went upstairs.

Mr. Bowyer was still alone, and a sudden impulse prompted her so strongly to speak then that she felt she must obey it, and would have done so but that, as she waited for him to address her first, the dinner-bell rang, and her second chance was gone.

In the afternoon they were left alone again, as Mrs. Priolo professed fatigue, and went to her own room; but Mr. Bowyer was cross, and, curtly declining Ellen's offers to play to him or read aloud, sat quietly in his arm-chair near the fire, till at last the heat and the unbroken silence caused him to doze off.



He slept for some hours, and woke up in a better temper. Though still at a loss to understand Ellen's reticence on the subject of Mr. Weare, he was now ready to believe that it might not be from any ulterior motive; for he was really fond of the girl, and showed it in his manner when nothing occurred to ruffle his equanimity. Now, as he addressed her kindly, Ellen only too gladly accepted the olive-branch. Changeable, even cross and unjust though he often was, she recognized the warmth of feeling he really cherished for her deep down in his heart; and then was he not the only creature in the wide, wide world on whom she had any claim? Having no strong-minded yearnings after independence, she clung the more closely to the home he had made for her.

She went across the room, and stood behind his chair, her arm resting on the top rail, talking to him gently about general matters which she thought might interest him, loath to disturb the harmony between them by recurring to the hateful past. Presently he asked for some tea, and she went to get it ready. No servant was ever allowed to prepare any of the food for the invalid; for it was really a labor of love on Ellen's part, and professedly so on Mrs. Priolo's, besides which, the doctor had insisted on great care being exercised in all matters of diet.

She came back in a few minutes with a cup of tea sweetened and with cream as he liked it, and, putting it down on a small table beside him, was going to draw a chair closer to the fire, when she remembered something that she had forgotten to tell the servants, and ran down-stairs again. As she returned, having been detained longer than she expected, and while still at a little distance from the sitting-room door, she thought she heard a stifled cry proceeding from that direction. She stood still to listen, then, seized with a sudden indefinable fear, she rushed on into the room.

Mr. Bowyer was writhing in terrible agony in his chair,



his face livid and drawn out of all resemblance to itself with pain; at intervals a sharp groan escaped from his lips, but it was evident that already he was getting too weak to find relief even in that.

Horried and bewildered, feeling she was utterly useless in such a fearful emergency, Ellen ran back, screaming for help.

The servants flew upstairs, but Mrs. Priolo, prompt and alert as usual, was on the spot first.

“What is it?” she called out sharply as she came up.

“Mr. Bowyer is dying!” cried Ellen, wildly.

The housekeeper fell back against the wall as though shot. She had looked pale and frightened before, but now she turned almost gray, and gasped for breath.

Ellen and the cook, an elderly woman who seemed to be the only one capable of action, had gone back into the room and were trying to administer brandy. They managed to get a few drops between his clinched teeth; and then Ellen, recovering her presence of mind, sent the housemaid for the doctor. The other two women stood and watched the suffering man, longing yet unable to help.

It was heart-rending to see how utterly overcome and prostrated he was by pain, how his strength seemed to be slowly leaving him with each paroxysm. Sometimes, when the struggles ceased for a moment and he lay back with open upturned eyes, they thought he must be dead.

Mrs. Priolo had disappeared, but in about ten minutes she came back with a glass of what looked like steaming punch. With something of her old composure and promptitude, though her face still maintained its ghastly pallor, she raised Mr. Bowyer's head on her arm and ordered him to drink what she had brought.

“Drink every drop of it; it will do you good,” she said, peremptorily; and he obeyed her.

A few minutes later he vomited violently. After that



the pains seemed to grow fainter, though the prostration still remained—indeed increased.

When the doctor arrived, they had managed to get him into bed, and he had sunk into a sleep from exhaustion.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

It was Mrs. Priolo who explained exactly what had occurred, what the symptoms had been, and how, after a violent fit of vomiting, his condition had seemed to improve.

“What caused the sickness? Did you give him anything?” asked the doctor, looking keenly from one to another of the women who were in the room.

“Nothing but some hot brandy and water,” answered the housekeeper, quickly. “I thought it might be cramp, or something of that sort.”

“Well, well, whatever caused it, undoubtedly it saved his life.”

“What was the matter with him, sir?” cried the cook. “It came on so sudden like. At dinner he was quite well, and at five Miss Ellen came down and got him a cup of tea. He was quite well then, was he not, miss?”

Ellen nodded her head in confirmation. All four women stood round the bed, awed and distressed; the whole affair was so inexplicable, and therefore so alarming. Every eye was fixed now upon the medical man in the expectation of having the mystery cleared, and none but Mrs. Priolo noticed that the eyelids of the sick man moved faintly and his thin pinched features quivered. Slowly he was waking out of the sleep which had been half unconscious.

“Mr. Bowyer has taken poison!” said the doctor, severely. “Through some culpable carelessness, arsenic must have been mixed in the tea he drank this afternoon.”



From Ellen Warde's lips burst forth a faint exclamation. It was she who had given that tea and made it; it had passed through no other hands.

What did it all mean? Was she going mad, or was this a repetition of the former terrible episode in her life? It was unnatural—appalling! She looked up. Both the servants, with evident distrust, were gazing in her direction. Mrs. Priolo kept her eyes fixed on the doctor's face.

"The quantity he took was very small doubtless," he went on, gravely—"indeed it must have been so for him to be alive now, for in his weak state less than half the ordinary dose would have proved fatal; but—"

He stopped abruptly, suddenly conscious of the fact that no one was listening. Mr. Bowyer's eyes had opened wide and were fixed on Ellen Warde. Their expression was unmistakable—full of reproachful accusation and a horror too deep for words.

As suddenly, in her bewildered glance round, she encountered the fearful look he gave her, all the blood in her body seemed to rush to her face, and her heart nearly stopped its beating. Then, with a shrill terror-stricken cry, she turned and fled from the room.

The servants began to ask each other in whispers what it all meant—a question to which neither dared reply. Mrs. Priolo, who had remained unmoved by all that had taken place, bent over the invalid's pillow to rearrange it, and met his appealing meaning look, which apparently she understood.

"This is all very terrible—very terrible!" declared the doctor, growing even graver than he had been at first.

"It is a most unfortunate accident," agreed the house-keeper; "and we must be thankful it had not a more melancholy ending. Now that Mr. Bowyer is safe, we can afford to forgive the carelessness which caused it; but I am sure it will be a long time before Miss Ellen will forgive herself. I bought the arsenic myself to-day, and



placed it in the same cupboard where the sugar, salt, and such things are all kept. I feel I am much to blame too, for when you are in a hurry it is so easy to make mistakes."

The sick man's eyes closed wearily, and he gave a relieved sigh.

The doctor still looked doubtful, but was too much a man of the world not to accept the proffered explanation. He prescribed some remedial medicines for Mr. Bowyer; and, with repeated injunctions to keep up his strength and not let him be disturbed, he took his leave.

When all that she could do was done, and Mr. Bowyer had sunk into a quiet refreshing sleep, Mrs. Priolo left the sick-room and went in search of Ellen Warde. The girl was at her mercy now, and dared not refuse any terms she chose to dictate. For the future, there would be no one to stand in her light; in anticipation she might look upon Mr. Bowyer's fortune as her own.

Entering the sitting-room, she found it in darkness, the servants having been too busy to light the lamps; but the window-curtains were still undrawn, and a flood of brilliant moonlight streamed across the floor. By its light she found the girl she sought. She was crouched upon the sofa in an attitude of utter hopelessness. She was not weeping, because the situation was too sad, too terrible for tears. Mrs. Priolo coughed to attract her attention, and she sprung up instantly and faced her defiantly, feeling intuitively that she had come on no friendly errand.

"What is it?" she asked, haughtily, determined not to give in to her enemy at once, however weak the defense she had to offer.

"That is what I came to ask you. I must beg to remind you of a fact you have hitherto forgotten. I am Mr. Bowyer's sister-in-law as well as his housekeeper; and it is as the former that I shall question you now."

"What do you want to know?"



Mrs. Priolo drew herself up to her full height. She was a tall thin woman, and looked taller than she really was in the menacing position that she had adopted.

“I want to know how it happened that arsenic was given to Mr. Bowyer in his tea to-day?”

The girl shuddered slightly as she recognized the meaning in her tones, but replied with tolerable composure—

“I know as little about it as you. I certainly made the tea this afternoon, but I took the tea and sugar and milk from their usual places. If arsenic was mixed with one of them, I had of course no knowledge of it.”

“For that there is only your word; and you have others to persuade as well as me.”

“No one so hard and cruel as you!” cried the girl, desperately. “Who else would believe that I—his niece—could do so terrible a thing as that which your manner suggests?”

“You are not his niece,” the housekeeper reminded her, coldly. “Mr. Bowyer had no sisters and no brother except my late husband.”

“You do not know that. It is mere conjecture.”

“Is it? We shall see presently how much I know, how much I only guess, if you drive me to speaking plainly. Take my advice, and go from here at once before an inquiry is raised.”

“I do not fear an inquiry. I should rather court it, seeing that I am innocent.”

“That has to be proved. Everything is against you; it was you who suggested bringing the poison into the house; it was you who gave Mr. Bowyer the drink in which the poison was mixed; it was you who had the strongest reason to wish for his death. I know that he told you he would leave you twenty thousand pounds.”

The pale silvery light that fell upon Ellen's face showed plainly its perplexity and pain. It seemed as though a net



had been thrown over her and she was inextricably entangled in its meshes.

“What is it you wish me to do?” she exclaimed, helplessly.

“I wish you to leave the house at once—never to return, never to cross our paths here or anywhere again.”

“You can not mean that. Don’t you see it would be a confession of guilt were I to go away so?”

“And was it not a confession of guilt when you declined to meet Mr. Bowyer’s accusing look just now?” Then, as the girl still stood her ground, she added, laying more and more emphasis on each spiteful, cruel word, “And was it not a confession of guilt when two years ago you fled rather than stand your trial for the murder of your own sister?”

Ellen covered her face with her hands and gave a low moan full of uncontrollable anguish. Was she never to be free from the past, never to escape its consequences?

“You know that?” she breathed, faintly.

“I know all, Elaine Warrington; and I leave you to think what chance you would have of clearing yourself from the present charge against you were I to reveal that other one which now rests in abeyance. Who could doubt your capability of attempting to murder a man who was merely an adopted relative, an uncle by repute, when already you had been accused of a crime a thousand times more unnatural, more fiendish?”

The girl fell upon her knees, her hands clasped above her head, utterly broken and conquered.

“Oh, spare me, spare me!” she implored. “Why do you persecute me? Why do you hate me so?”

Not a gleam of pity was in the woman’s cold metallic eyes as she looked down on the bent figure before her. There was only the triumph of gratified malice in manner and expression as she replied—

“It is because I wish you well that I am speaking to you



thus alone, instead of publicly denouncing you, as I might have done."

Elaine realized the hopelessness of all appeal, and rose slowly to her feet.

"It is late—too late for you to go now; but early tomorrow morning you must leave, or take the consequences. I will not sit down to another meal with you; the house has been contaminated too long already by your presence."

Elaine looked at her curiously, scarcely believing in the reality of such inexorable hatred. Was it possible she could really believe her to be culpable? Yet it seemed even more unlikely that she would profess to believe it merely to further her own ends. In any case she could not stoop to defend herself; moreover, she felt convinced that neither explanation nor entreaty would avail.

"Well," asked the woman, insolently, "what do you think of me? You've stared at me long enough, I'm sure."

"I think you must be a very wicked woman," returned the girl, quietly.

"The opinion of such as you is worth nothing; but, considering you're in my power, you'd better keep it to yourself," was the sharp retort, though the speaker had perceptibly winced under Elaine's contemptuous gaze and the candor of her reply.

"I have no fear of you. I know you are only too glad to be rid of me so easily. If I never come back, you will be content to let matters remain as they are?"

"I have promised not to say what I know if you keep away; that was pure charity."

"Charity from you!"

Trembling all over with suppressed excitement and anger, Mrs. Priolo's real coarseness and vulgarity burst through the thin coating of veneer with which she had endeavored to hide them, and, reverting to her real self—the quondam bar-maid of Montreal—with one hand upraised in denunciation, she heaped one invective on another, but without



provoking a reply. Scarcely deigning a glance in her direction, Elaine turned quietly and left the room, closing the door behind her.

The housekeeper could not help feeling uncomfortably aware that, though the victory was hers, all the dignities and honors of war which should have accompanied it were on the other side.

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## CHAPTER XX.

A DULL foggy morning. Though there had been no rain, the ground was quite wet, and showers of drops fell from the overhanging trees at every gust of wind. The damp seemed to cling to and envelope everything, while the cold was so piercing and penetrating that even in his thick overcoat Colonel Severn shivered as he rode on quickly toward Greathaven. It was business, not pleasure, that took him out that morning; afterward he was half inclined to call it fate.

Presently, a few paces before him—for the fog prevented his seeing further than that ahead—he saw a girl struggling on under the weight of a heavy bag, her saturated skirts clinging round her feet and impeding her progress.

Something familiar struck him in the gait, and he hurried on till he came nearly to her side. She was dressed in black, and a thick crape veil hid her features; but a gleam of light golden hair and an involuntary shrinking away as she turned and saw him assured him of her identity, though her presence there at such an hour and in such a plight seemed impossible.

“Miss Warde, is it you?”

A momentary impulse prompted her to affect not to know him, and so to pass on unquestioned; but she was weak and weary, and could not resist the temptation of speaking to him, though it were only to say good-bye.

She threw back her veil and disclosed a face pale and



sad, but infinitely lovely. The moisture lay in drops upon her thick crape bonnet and on the soft tendrils of bright hair, but her deep gray eyes shone through the fog like two stars, while her red lips quivered piteously, like those of a frightened child.

"Yes, it is I," she said.

"But what are you doing here at this time?"

"I might ask the same of you," she returned, with an attempt at gayety which completely failed to deceive him, so pathetic was the little catch in her voice which she tried to turn into a laugh.

"That is a different thing altogether. You are walking, and have a traveling-bag. You are going away—where?"

"Where?" she repeated vaguely; then, with a sudden sense of the desperateness of her position, she added passionately, "Ah, if I only knew!"

Severn had got down from his horse; the bridle was over his arm, and the bag that she held he had taken from her; with his other hand he touched her lightly on the sleeve.

"Let me tell you. Trust yourself to my guidance," he entreated.

"There is no one I would sooner listen to."

"Then turn back with me now. Mr. Bowyer is your natural protector. Believe me, it is very, very hard for a woman to face the world alone. Don't try it—don't."

"If you knew all," she began.

"My advice would still be the same. In every phase of life there are trials to be borne; but a woman is always safer and happier in her own home."

"Mr. Bowyer is not my uncle."

Colonel Severn expressed no surprise. He had suspected for some time that the tie between them was not that of relationship.

"Still he has adopted you; and that he is really fond of you I am sure. Have you any one nearer to you than he is?"



She shook her head sadly.

“Then take my advice, and go back.”

With a movement he indicated the way that she should go; but she still hung back, hesitating.

“First listen to my story.”

Again he interrupted her, this time with an accent of authority.

“I will listen as we walk back together. Come.”

Half smiling, she complied, though her eyes were full of tears. She felt inexpressibly comforted by his presence, his sympathy and proffered help. No longer was she quite alone, and by no other would she so gladly be counseled and directed.

When their faces were turned toward Littlehaven, and while they were walking along briskly side by side, Ellen blurted out her story—the events of the day before.

Put into plain words, and told in the light of day, the consciousness of innocence pervading the recital, the whole thing sounded ridiculous and far-fetched. She was not surprised when the colonel laughed aloud as she finished.

“Why, the woman must be mad as well as wicked, to imagine you capable of such a crime! Pshaw—it is too absurd!”

“And yet to any one who did not believe in me the case would seem a very strong one. It was I who suggested having the poison to kill the rats, instead of a trap, and I who made the tea in which the poison must have been.”

“It is too absurd,” he repeated. “I wonder you allowed yourself to be frightened so.”

She looked away from him as she replied in a low shamed voice—

“But then you don’t know all. There is a secret—something that happened long ago—which she has discovered—something which it would ruin me were she to tell. It was that with which she threatened me.”

“My poor little girl!”



The words broke from his lips in irrepressible pity. How slight and frail she looked as she battled with the wind, and so child-like! Yet she had this ever-present terror about which she could not speak and was afraid to think.

She looked up gratefully into his face. She saw that no doubt existed in his mind as to her innocence, and felt it very sweet to meet with such sympathy.

Severn had been puzzling how to advise her for the best; presently he asked her—

“Has Mr. Bowyer any idea of—of this secret?”

“Oh, yes, he knows it very well!”

“Then surely he has some influence with his housekeeper to prevent her speaking against his wish?”

“But would he use that influence now? Last night he looked at me with a convulsive shiver that was not caused by damp or cold—as though—as though he really believed me capable of trying to harm him.”

Colonel Severn looked grave. A doubt assailed him whether he had done well in inducing her to return. He had seen, when Mr. Bowyer first mooted the subject of the girl's marriage portion, that she no longer stood so high with him as formerly. What if this unreasonable suspicion had alienated his affection altogether? If he were ready to combine with Mrs. Priolo against her, Ellen Warde's position might be a very dangerous one, and he—Severn—would have placed her in it. His only course would be to leave her at the Abbey while he went and saw how the land lay.

The same idea seemed to have struck Elaine, for she suggested timidly—

“Had we not better discover whether Mr. Bowyer is willing to receive me back before I go there?”

“That would be the best plan. I will go myself and find out. But first we must have some breakfast. You look quite pale and tired.”

A few minutes more brought them to the Abbey. A



pleasant-looking elderly woman opened the door to them, and at Colonel Severn's command led the way to a room where a bright fire was burning.

There Ellen dried her clothes as best she could and brushed the wet from her hair; then she went to the breakfast-room, where Colonel Severn was waiting. He was preparing the coffee, and looked a little abashed when Ellen entered.

"They always make it so badly—I thought I would see if I could remember how we used to manage it in camp," he said.

"Let me do it," she begged; and delightedly he assented, watching her with a half smile and just a tinge of sadness while she flitted about so naturally and without *gêne*, as though she was in her own home.

There were both pain and pleasure in seeing her at the head of his table, her pretty slim fingers hovering over the massive silver coffee-service, of so old a fashion that to lift the largest piece she had to take both hands. If only it might be always so—he and she together!

When the meal was over—to Severn it seemed the shortest to which he had ever sat down—Ellen rose and went over to the mantel-piece. Two photograph frames were on it; one contained a portrait of Charlie, looking very bright and handsome in cricketing flannels, and the other that of a girl with soft blue eyes and fair hair, something like him in feature, but dressed in the style of some twenty years before. She guessed who it was, and felt a vague sense of jealousy. Though she had died so long ago, it might be that her memory was dearer to him who had been her husband than any living woman could ever be.

"That is my poor wife," said Colonel Severn, who had followed the direction of her gaze.

There was just the proper amount of regret in his tones, yet Ellen knew at once—such freemasonry is there in love—that she need have no fear. Whatever had induced him



to marry his wife, it had not been the prompting of passion, or else the feeling had long since died out and was forgotten. Glancing shyly at his face, Ellen decided that the former supposition was the more likely to be true; his eyes were so steadfast, and the firmness of his lips too precluded the idea that he could easily change. Besides, he had told her once that he had never been in love. Their eyes met, and she averted hers, feeling embarrassed and suddenly becoming self-conscious.

He noticed her confusion, and, though he did not guess by what it was engendered, he hastened to set her at ease.

“Now I will go and interview Mr. Bowyer,” he said. “Here is an easy-chair—the easiest in the room; take my word for it, Miss Warde—and here are some new magazines. Mind the servants keep up a good fire, and ask for anything you want.”

He had suited his actions to his words, and after seeing her comfortably seated before the fire, with a pile of papers and books on a table beside her, went out.

When he had left the room, Ellen jumped up and watched him from the window. How strong and stalwart he looked as he walked away with rapid strides—a man to trust in all things, to lean upon and look to for advice and aid—a faithful friend, a true lover!

The day had brightened somewhat, though the sun was still hiding behind a thin veil of clouds; the wind had nearly driven away the fog. It came in sharp strong gusts, and all the lawn and the neatly kept drive were strewn with fallen leaves; the trees looked bare and cold. Altogether it was more like winter than autumn; and Ellen soon returned to her seat near the fire.

She was all alone in the house that was her lover's. What wonder if fancies overmastered facts and ran riot in strange directions? Thoughts sweet and tender made the blood mantle her pale cheeks and set her eyes a-glowing. She forgot the troubles of the present in day-dreams of a



possible future, till presently she fell asleep, and, sleeping, dreamed.

There was no surprise in her expression, only unalloyed pleasure, when, more than an hour later, she awoke and found Severn at her side. He had come back and found her sleeping, and involuntarily the name by which he thought of her escaped from his lips, and the sound roused her.

“Elaine!” he had whispered, not meaning her to hear; but, when her eyes opened, he felt constrained to say something to break the spell which he saw held her as well as him. Cruel as it was to remind her of the trouble which for the moment had escaped her mind, he felt it would be best, or who knew how their interview might end?

“I have come from Mr. Bowyer. He is ready to receive you back. Will you come with me now, or will you rest a little longer?”

“I am quite ready when you are.”

She had risen to her feet, and the dazed dreamy look was fading from her face as slowly she remembered where she was and why.

“What did he say?” she asked, eagerly. “Does he think—”

“He is ill and fanciful,” interposed the colonel, not allowing her to finish; “and that horrid woman had evidently poisoned his mind against you. But that he loves you still, I am certain; and when he sees you the absurd suspicion will soon die a natural death.”

She stood with clasped hands gazing hopelessly before her.

“But we will not wait for that,” he went on quickly. “I will find out who really did it, so that you may be exonerated and happy. I will start an inquiry to-day, and will not rest, I promise you, till it is completed.”

“How good you are to me!” she murmured.

“If you only knew what a pleasure it is to me to befriend



you, you would not have broken your promise to come to me if ever you were in trouble—you would say I was the most selfish man in existence,” he told her, smiling.

When she had resumed her outdoor clothing, they started for the Dower House.

On the road Colonel Severn spoke to her of his life in India, of the adventures he had had there and the campaigns he had been through. He sought to turn her thoughts from the present trouble, and so strengthen her for the meeting with Mr. Bowyer, which he guessed would be a trying one; and he partly succeeded.

She listened eagerly as he talked; to hear of the years that he had spent before she knew him was inexpressibly interesting. Her heart bled for him as she realized how little of brightness and joy those years had ever known, though it was only by inference and unintentionally that he admitted how lonely he had often been. Very seldom he spoke about himself, and then only as briefly as might be; but on this day, speaking to the woman he loved, who was his friend, his tongue seemed loosened, and every word came from his heart, while his tones betrayed even more than he intended.

The walk was over sooner than either wished. Severn sighed for a pleasure ended, and Ellen shrunk back nervously as she remembered the ordeal to come.

“You are not frightened? Shall I go in with you?” he asked, his hand upon the gate.

“I think it would be better to go alone—he would like it better too; but I thank you very, very much for all your kindness.”

He looked at her for a moment without replying, then said—

“To-day Mr. Bowyer spoke of you as ‘Elaine’ by mistake, and the other day I heard you called so too. Is it your real name?”

She bowed her head in assent.



“Thank you for trusting me so far. I am glad I know how to call you in my thoughts. That other name never fitted, never seemed appropriate at all; but Elaine—Elaine the lily-maid—it is the sweetest name that woman ever bore!”

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## CHAPTER XXI.

To the surprise of every one, Mr. Bowyer had so far recovered on the morning after his narrow escape from being poisoned that he was able to go down-stairs soon after breakfast, and sat by the fire in his dressing-gown, looking white and shaken certainly, yet far better than might have been expected. The fact was, the apprehensions of the past month had been more terrible to him to bear than the actual danger in which he had been on the night before. Like many other nervous people, he could better face a real than a fancied cause of dread, and could show considerable strength of mind when it was absolutely needed.

He was naturally deeply grieved and disappointed at the discovery of Elaine's supposed perfidy; but he had been in a manner prepared for it by the housekeeper's repeated hints and warnings, and it was almost a relief to know that the worst was over and he need fear no more.

Oddly enough, he did not feel his indebtedness to Mrs. Priolo as keenly as she had a right to expect; indeed he felt what even to himself seemed an unreasonable wrath with her because the prognostications he had affected to discredit had proved correct. Perhaps she had not been altogether able to keep the “I told you so” expression from her face which men, especially those who pride themselves upon their sharpness, always find so galling. However this might be, he felt angry and sore at heart, his chief anxiety being the doubt that now exercised his mind as to what was to become of this girl whom no impulse of gratitude or affection could restrain.



He had come to no conclusion when Severn was announced, and rather welcomed his arrival as a temporary relaxation from the thought that troubled him.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," began the colonel, as they shook hands.

"Then you have heard all about it—the accident, I mean?"

"Not all"—meaningly. "But I know you took some poison by mistake, and must congratulate you on having so far recovered from its effects."

"It was rather a narrow escape, I fancy. You see"—with an attempt at gayety—"I am such a bag of bones and nerves that it would take less to kill me than most men."

A slight pause, which Severn broke by coming abruptly to the point.

"I came," he said, "to speak to you about Miss Warde."

"She is in her room, I believe. Do you wish to speak to or of her?"—striving to maintain an appearance of ease, though this was the last subject in the world which he was ready to discuss just then. If the colonel had come to make overtures on his son's behalf, how could he reply? He felt that after what had passed he ought not to allow Elaine to enter another house as a loved and trusted inmate—yet what reason could he give for a refusal?

"I have spoken to her already. Have you not heard that she left your house this morning?"

Try as he would, Mr. Bowyer felt it impossible to keep an expression of contentment from his face. This was exactly what he would have wished her to do. To turn a woman out of doors was more than he could do, were she the veriest wretch in creation; but, if she chose to leave him, he was free from blame—free even from self-reproach.

"I met her on the road between this and Greathaven this morning, struggling against the wind and wet through with the fog. I guessed something of her intentions from the bag she was carrying, and afterward she told me what



had passed, and how—it seems absurd to repeat—you thought her guilty.”

“If she was not guilty, why did she leave my house?” questioned Mr. Bowyer, shrewdly.

“Because your housekeeper had discovered a secret in her past life, and brought such pressure to bear on her.”

“Impossible!”—half starting from his chair.

“It is what she told me; and I do not think her capable of falsehood.”

Mr. Bowyer leaned back again and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

“Do you think any man can judge a woman truly? The intricacies and contradictions of her character must always remain a mystery to him, and he is never quite unbiased by the personal attributes, perhaps attractions, she may possess.”

“I think,” returned the colonel, decisively, “that it is impossible to mistake a bad woman for a pure one, or *vice versa*. Men are sometimes queer mixtures of good and evil, but no woman could do what you suspect Miss Warde of having done unless she were utterly abandoned; and that”—warmly—“I can swear Miss Warde is not.”

“You are a younger man than I,” observed the lawyer, dryly. “And yet I don’t know that it is only youth that can be blinded by a pretty face and plausibility; for I too believed in her spite of repeated warnings, and once against almost incontrovertible evidence.”

“You were right then—you are wrong now, I assure you.”

“I wish I could believe you. I would give more than you imagine to know that Elaine was innocent, and worthy of my love.”

He spoke with real emotion, and the feeling of anger that had been in Severn’s heart melted as he realized that it had not been lightly or with indifference that the girl for whom he pleaded had been condemned. It was impossible



to misconstrue the feeling which had prompted this last speech. The lawyer's judgment, which experience inclined him to trust, had been constrained to pronounce an adverse verdict, but his affection was hers still, and he would be glad to be convinced of error.

"Where was the child going when you met her?"—suddenly.

"She did not know herself. To London, I suppose."

"Impossible! She had no money, or at most a few shillings, in her pocket. She would have starved."

"I am very thankful that I met her!"

"And so am I," declared Mr. Bowyer, earnestly. "I should never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to her."

"Then I may tell her she is to come back?"—inquiringly.

Mr. Bowyer hesitated.

"I will allow her two, three, or four hundred a year, and let her live where she pleases," he said at last.

"You know best if she would take an allowance from you; unless there is a close relationship between you, I should say she would not. While she thought herself of use to you she could accept your bounty, but not otherwise—so at least I fancy."

"You have judged correctly, I am afraid. Even while under my roof, doing everything she could to help me, she would never let me give her anything beyond actual necessities."

"So you must either welcome her back or renounce her altogether."

Mr. Bowyer's brows were knit together in deep perplexity. Inclination and what he felt was duty were at war with each other, and the battle was a hard one. It was only by a stupendous effort of will that he allowed at last his innate nobility of mind to conquer. Though he believed her to have attempted his life, though to see her and live



with her again after what had occurred would be agony to him in his present state of physical and mental weakness, still he would do what he knew to be right—he would receive her back.

He stood up, an approving conscience giving him momentary strength.

“Let her come. The past shall be forgotten, or at least forgiven.”

“You are still supposing her to be guilty?”—indignantly.

“Yes; I do suppose so”—sadly; “but, having once taken a responsibility upon me, I will not shirk it.”

It was Colonel Severn's turn to pause in doubt. All his pride in the woman he loved revolted at the idea of her being received so, yet had he the right to refuse for her this her natural haven of refuge? He respected the old lawyer, and felt certain she would find justice and kindness at his hands, if not the love and confidence of old. Then where else could she go? Even if she loved him—Severn—well enough to marry him, he could not ask her to share his home if by so doing it became closed to his only son. Besides, did she not love Gerald Weare?

Mr. Bowyer guessed something of what was troubling him, and, reseating himself, went on, in slow, passionless tones that were more convincing than the most violent asseverations—

“I might think with you if my knowledge of the case were as limited as yours. There was a time when I too believed nothing against Ellen Warde, but that time has passed forever. Even if I were not predisposed to doubt her, from circumstances of which only I am aware, I could not be blind to the strong proofs against her now.”

“And yet you would have her back, believing her so vile, and therefore I dare say not free from the fear that the danger you have undergone may occur again with a less fortunate sequel!”

“I am ready to take that risk”—gravely.



“Then I have only to beg that you will conceal your real opinion so far as you are able.”

“All shall be as it was before. I am not quite a brute, I hope!”

“Indeed you are not!” cried Severn, enthusiastically, grasping his hand. “You are one of the noblest men I have ever met, if in this instance the most misguided. I shall not be afraid to advise her to return.”

No more remaining to be said, Severn took his leave, scarcely knowing whether to be satisfied with the result of his visit or no; and Mr. Bowyer’s first act was to ring and request the presence of Mrs. Priolo.

The summons was obeyed by her with some inward tremor; she guessed that Elaine’s departure was discovered, and was uncertain how the invalid might take it.

“Were you aware that Miss Warde left the house this morning with the intention of not returning?” he began, severely.

“I thought it was likely she would go.”

“Then why did you not warn me, so that I might prevent her?”

“Because you were too ill to be disturbed—because I did not think you would wish her to remain after what occurred last night,” answered Mrs. Priolo, boldly, though her heart sunk.

“Then kindly remember for the future that I am never too ill to be consulted on so important a matter—that I am master of my own house, and expect to be informed of all that is going on in it.”

“If I had known,” she faltered.

“You know now,” he told her, sternly.

She stood there quietly, waiting for further orders, profoundly impressed by his manner, which had something of its former decision; his voice too was firm, and had none of the hesitation which had distinguished it of late.

“Miss Warde will return in less than an hour. See that



her room is ready for her and a fire burning. It is a miserably cold, damp day."

"Coming back!" cried Mrs. Priolo, unable to disguise her surprise and disgust.

But Mr. Bowyer's severe look recalled her to herself.

"Go at once and do as I have told you," he commanded; and meekly she obeyed.

Left alone, his strength to some degree collapsed. The knowledge that he was doing right had up to the present sustained him; but, when there was no further need for showing courage and determination, the power of doing so deserted him.

He had loved his protégée more dearly than either he or she had supposed, and to be compelled to believe her capable of so cowardly a crime against him had hurt him more than the deed itself. Had she carried out her intention and thrown herself upon the world, he would never have forgiven himself, and would have remembered her more as sinned against than sinning. But she was coming back, and all the old terror would be revived with added vehemence—for, now he knew his suspicion to be well founded, he feared that what once had been attempted might be tried again, and with success. His existence would be a constant anxiety to himself; he could never forget the terrible possibilities that might at any time prove facts. The prospect appalled him. It was a ghastly idea that he should live under the same roof with one who had wished his death—had even tried to compass it. It was as though the last hours of a criminal should be spent with the executioner who on the morrow was to take his life. His peace of mind was gone from him forever—for how could he be at ease in such a strait? The situation was unnatural—it was more than mortal man could bear.

A hundred times he tried to reassure himself with the thought that she would not dare to attempt such a thing again, having once been suspected; it would be too great a



risk to run were the coveted stakes ever so valuable. Yet neither reason nor common sense could avail him.

Now that he had pledged himself to do his duty and could not recall his word, he found that the task was beyond his strength. Such a trial he had neither the necessary physical nor the necessary mental power to endure.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

AN hour later, when Elaine crept in, Mr. Bowyer had mustered up sufficient courage to meet her with at least outward calm. She came in with downcast eyes and cheeks crimson with shame, not for herself, but him, because he should have misjudged her so. A painful feeling of shyness, still on his account, prevented her drawing near and kept her silent. Not for worlds would she have spoken, since all she could have said then must have been in self-exoneration or reproach. She could not—would not stoop to defend herself; while how could she upbraid him for this one sin against her, when in the past he had been so generous in his aid?

The sick man seemed to look her through and through, as though he would read her every thought; yet he was not surprised that he failed to pierce beneath the surface. Long before, in the zenith of his successful career, he had confessed his utter inability to gauge the inner workings of a woman's brain.

“We see just as much as they wish us to see—no more,” he had said then laughingly to a colleague; and he said the same to himself now, but without a smile. Such truisms become so much more serious when applied to one's own case and proved to one's own discomfiture.

Elaine's silence and her averted gaze might have been unhesitatingly attributed to guilt by one less experienced; but the old lawyer was more puzzled than convinced. He saw the pride beneath the quietude and humility of her de-



meanor, and he knew that such was her gratitude, real or affected, for what he had done before, that, however unjust he might be now, she would never rebel, but suffer mutely at his pleasure.

Sighing deeply, he relinquished the subject. By and bye, when he was stronger, it could be reopened—now it tried and troubled him too much. For the present it must be set aside; and, since not actually proved guilty, Elaine must be treated as innocent—an advantage any criminal could claim.

His self-imposed duty must be done wholly, or not at all.

“You are tired, child, and cold. You would like to go to your room. There is a fire there, and Jane will get you a cup of tea.”

Tears sprung to her eyes at the unexpected tone of kindness. She came forward and knelt beside his chair, looking yearningly into his eyes, as though grateful for so much, yet wanting more—far more still.

Somewhat nervously he avoided meeting her gaze.

“Go and rest, Elaine. You are overtired. After dinner you shall read to me if you are able.”

Disappointed, dispirited, the girl rose, understanding now what the terms were on which they met. He believed her guilty, yet, for his word's sake, as he had adopted her cause at first, and promised Colonel Severn now to take her back, he would treat her well and kindly—but she must not attempt to cross the barrier between them. Love and confidence were withdrawn from her—she must not ask for either. Yet she, like Colonel Severn, did not fail to recognize his generosity in receiving her now that—believing what he did—love and trust were no longer possible. She must help him in his task, not make it more difficult by useless, painful appeals. She owed him so much—so much; never, never must she forget that! Smiling bravely, she thanked him, and left the room, mounting the stairs with a weary tread and still more weary heart.



Everything was against her. Could she ever bear it, enduring with patience and good temper to the end?

The day passed at last—it was almost the longest she had ever known—and, when night came, and she laid her head on her pillow, she felt as though she should never raise it again.

The next morning she was too ill to leave her bed; a low fever had seized her, due to the excitement of the past two days and a chill taken on the previous morning. For nearly a week she lay prostrate, happily too weak even to think, while exhausted nature gradually recovered itself. Then the natural elasticity of youth reasserted itself, and she could once more take up the burden of life, feeling all the stronger and more valiant for the brief rest. To Mr. Bowyer her absence had also come as a relief, and, when once assured that there was nothing seriously wrong, he reveled in the new sense of freedom from fear. Mrs. Priolo too was a much pleasanter companion now that they were alone; and often and often a secret wish arose that they had remained so—that he had never introduced this turbulent element into their quiet *solitude à deux*.

But this happy state of things could not last forever. After a little while Ellen was down with them again, looking pale and weak after her illness, yet practically little the worse, for she had been delicate always, and never possessed much color. Then the old contentions recommenced. Mrs. Priolo soon rallied from the rebuff that she had received, and returned to the attack with renewed vigor, while Elaine, whose really sweet temper had somewhat suffered from the constant strain, retorted more frequently than she had done before. Formerly she had made some allowance for the woman's natural chagrin at having the field no longer to herself; but now—since the morning when she had been driven out into the world friendless and homeless by her cruel, scathing words of the night before—she looked upon her with undisguised loathing, as on



some noxious reptile whose venom might mean death, yet who engendered disgust rather than fear. She dreaded her no longer, and did not hesitate to show the hatred that she felt, though it could do no good, and might only incite her to further virulence.

Mr. Bowyer was always kind to her—even affectionate and pitiful at times, when his better feelings had the ascendancy; yet she could not but notice that he avoided being with her, and grew more and more dependent on the housekeeper for everything he wanted. And once it had been so different! Then nothing was rightly done unless she did it for him; and the change had come so gradually that she scarcely noticed it as it progressed—only now, when it was complete, and too late to combat. That she owed this to Mrs. Priolo she knew well, and dared not hope that her malice would rest satisfied with this. Yet what was she to do?

On this subject Mrs. Priolo was also undecided. But one thing she had determined—the same roof should not shelter both. Mr. Bowyer had displayed more resistance than she had expected, but she would wear him out in time. A man's obstinacy, however strong, can always be conquered by the persistent droppings from a woman's tongue.

For some time she gave only little hints and innuendoes which he could not fail to understand, yet to which there was absolutely nothing he could reply; then at last she decided that it was time to say something definite and to the point.

She had come into the sitting-room and found him with his body bent toward the fire and his head buried in his hands. When, hearing footsteps, he looked up and saw her standing there, he pulled himself together instantly, and began to talk of indifferent matters, till, finding that he was receiving no answers, he lapsed as suddenly into silence.

Then it was Mrs. Priolo's turn.



"I wish you would let me speak, sir," she said, gravely.

"Could I prevent you?"—with an uneasy smile. "To stop the flow of a woman's eloquence is beyond the power of any man, and certainly beyond mine."

"You know what I mean—"

"Do I?"

Nothing in his tone or manner encouraged her to proceed, yet she went on with the boldness of desperation.

"You will never be happy and contented so long as that girl remains in the house."

"Then I shall remain discontented, for I have no intention of altering present arrangements."

"It is killing you by inches," she declared.

For a moment he looked startled. Always easily alarmed about his health, he was ready to believe that the strain upon his nerves was trying him beyond his strength, until he remembered who was speaking, and that it was to her interest to frighten him.

"If I am in any danger, the doctor will probably warn me of it. You are my housekeeper, not my medical adviser."

"I am your own brother's widow, the trusted companion of the last ten years. Till Ellen Warde came we never had a disagreement. It is my loyalty to you that makes me brave your displeasure by saying what I think."

"You have done what you believe to be your duty, I dare say. Let that content you."

"Further than that, I have done no good by speaking."

"You have certainly not shaken my resolution in the very slightest. Miss Warde is my niece by adoption, if not by blood. I did not act unadvisedly or without due consideration when I brought her to my home."

"But surely you will never trust her after what has happened?"

"I will trust her implicitly," he answered, more with



the air of one who was making a vow to himself than in defiance of the warning given.

“Well, you know best, of course. You have known the young lady longer and you know her much better than I, and probably you have some good reason to believe her to be truthful and more trustworthy than late events would imply; you have some knowledge of her past—her home life—and can judge—”

“Be silent!” he cried, in an angry quavering voice. “Leave the poor girl in peace. At least she has never harmed you.”

“I spoke for your sake,” she reminded him.

“Then for my sake be silent for the future,” he said, with a cynical smile. “These discussions do me no good and give me unnecessary pain. Pray spare me any more.”

“It is as you wish, of course.”

She had said all that she had intended; and, even if she had contemplated any further innuendoes, it would have been impossible to speak them then, for the door opened and Elaine entered.

She entered as she did always now, with a tremulous half-deprecating smile, as though she doubted her welcome, yet felt it would look ungracious were she to stay away. Had Mr. Bowyer shown any sign of sleepiness or unwillingness to be amused, she would have crept away as quietly as she had come. But just now he was inclined to be kind to her and to prove his faith in her to himself as well as to the housekeeper.

“Where have you been, Ellen? I have missed you,” he said, gently.

“If I had only known, I could have come before. I was doing nothing—that is, nothing of consequence.”

“Come and sit beside me. How cold your hands are!”—taking one into his as she passed. “Have you no fire in your bedroom?”



"She never asked for a fire," put in the housekeeper, tartly.

"Then give her one without the asking. I shall be seriously angry if it is not kept up regularly."

"I did not feel the cold at all. It is only now when I come into the warm room that I realize it was perhaps a little chilly," said Elaine.

She half sat, half knelt on the fender-stool, and held out her hands to the blaze; so thin were they that the light seemed actually to shine through them and the delicate blue veins stood out with unnatural prominence.

Mr. Bowyer watched her with something of the old tenderness and concern. The attitude into which she had fallen was one that he remembered as that of another years ago, and the resemblance of the living woman to the dead struck him anew and stirred his heart with memories sweet, if painful too. He forgot all his fears and suspicions which had been proved so well founded; he forgot everything save that the features and actions of his old love were reproduced, and that he could almost fancy she was with him now. Ah, if she only were!

Would he doubt her and disbelieve as he had before? He thought not; and yet even in his thoughts he did not feel quite sure of himself. He felt that he was breaking up, and that in a year or two all this turmoil would be at an end. At his age nothing need matter much. What a fool he was to care!

"Shall I fetch you a cup of tea?" asked Mrs. Priolo, breaking into his reverie.

"Ellen will bring it to me to-day—won't you, child?"

She sprung up eagerly to do his bidding, but Mrs. Priolo blocked the door-way and prevented her from going out.

"You have forgotten," she said, meaningly. "It is I who prepare everything for Mr. Bowyer now."

Ellen flushed up and hesitated, but the invalid enforced his wish with a testiness which neither could disregard.



Mrs. Priolo sat apart and watched the girl's preparations in stolid quietude, declining the tea that was offered to her with a hastiness that Ellen felt to be insulting, although she would not appear to notice it. Mr. Bowyer's cup and saucer were placed on a small table beside him.

Ellen resumed her seat, and began to talk of a book that they had been lately reading; but Mr. Bowyer's answers were strangely brief, and not always to the point. His resolution was wavering—indeed had entirely given way. Again and again he told himself that it was more than improbable that a second attempt would be made on his life so soon, and in such circumstances, yet he could not bring himself to drink what she had given him. It might be senile weakness, it might be absolute failing of the faculties; but he could not battle with the feeling, nor could he hope that it would remain unnoticed.

Mrs. Priolo's keen eyes took in the situation at a glance, and a grim smile of satisfaction overspread her thin ill-tempered face; but Elaine was slower to discover how things were.

It was getting dark and past the usual time for bringing in the lamps when she rose to put the tea-things by. She was taking Mr. Bowyer's cup with the rest, when suddenly she discovered that it was untasted—untouched even.

“Why,” she began, then suddenly stopped.

It came upon her in a moment, with a terrible stunning force, what it all meant; and, utterly despairing, incapable of self-defense or even indignation, she stood there powerless and speechless.

Then Jane entered with the lights, and the spell was broken. Hastily putting down the cup, which half unconsciously she held still, she escaped from the room, and did not appear again that night.



## CHAPTER XXIII.

VARIOUS motives had kept Severn from the Dower House during the fortnight which had elapsed since Mr. Bowyer's misadventure. For one thing, he thought visitors would be unwelcome in the present strained relations of its inmates; for another, he was busy trying to discover who was at the bottom of that strange mistake—for he could not believe at first that what had been done had been done with murderous intent. Besides this, he knew that it would be unwise on his own account to see more of Elaine than was absolutely necessary; he could no longer trust himself to keep silent—indeed he had been perilously near self-betrayal at their last meeting.

Knowing that his own inexperience might injure rather than serve her interest, he had telegraphed for professional aid, and a very smart detective was sent down in answer to the summons. He set to work at once, but it was only after several false scents that at last a report was submitted to the colonel which showed that he was on the right track.

Colonel Severn sat down at once to impart the cheering news to Elaine. Of her illness he had heard nothing, or no thought as to what was expedient could have kept him away; yet, though he did not know all, he could guess something of what she had had to endure, and the letter he wrote was full of sympathy implied rather than expressed. Some intuitive presentiment of what was even then occurring prompted him to add a postscript—

“On no account take any decisive step without informing me. I know your position must be a very painful one; but bear it only a little longer. Do not, I implore you, be



tempted a second time to run away from your difficulties, for I am confident that in a very short time all will be cleared up.”

The letter fulfilled its intention, consoling and strengthening her to whom it was addressed. It came when Elaine's courage was at a very low ebb indeed, and very little would have tempted her to give up the unequal battle in which she had engaged, though on her side it had been mere endurance rather than actual fighting done. But now she felt as though it would be unjust to Colonel Severn were she not to await the issue of his attempt to help her, and it would be cutting herself adrift from him perhaps forever. This last argument had more influence with her than she knew. It enabled her to bear the insults that Mrs. Priolo heaped upon her continuously with a dignity and patience that drove her tormentor nearly frantic, she believing that it arose from a determined resolution to hold her own in the hope that she might ultimately triumph, and it helped her to face Mr. Bowyer again after that episode of the cup of tea which had hurt and angered her so sorely. Though indignant, she felt sorry for him too, understanding the struggle that was going on between his inclination and what he believed to be his duty; and she could not but admire the strength of will which showed up the more plainly in contrast with his physical and mental weakness.

Then something else occurred which, as one nail drives out another, made her forget the cause she already had to feel aggrieved.

Mr. Bowyer had been writing several letters lately to his bankers and to a legal firm that Colonel Severn had recommended to him some time before; therefore, when one morning a fly drove up to the door and a gentleman alighted, followed by a young man in plain black clothes who carried a mysterious-looking blue bag, Mrs. Priolo felt no



doubt concerning who they were and on what business they had come.

They remained closeted with the invalid for some time; then a servant was summoned from down-stairs to affix her signature to a document that she had no hesitation in pronouncing to be a will.

The housekeeper was in a state of almost unbearable suspense. Guessing some decisive step had been taken, probably to her disadvantage, she could scarcely contain herself, and paced the kitchen like a caged lioness, longing to know what had been done. Had he left her all? The woman's face was working with excitement, her bead-like eyes were shining, and her lips quivered, so that once or twice, when she was appealed to by the servants, she was not able to reply.

A bell rang, and Jane ran up to answer it, coming down presently with the startling intelligence that Mrs. Priolo and Miss Warde were both requested to join the gentlemen in the sitting-room.

Mrs. Priolo went up at once. To her surprise, the lawyer was waiting there alone. He rose somewhat slowly as she entered, not knowing quite to what class she belonged; but, as the next moment the door reopened and Elaine came in, he sprung forward with alacrity, and offered her a chair.

She accepted it with one of her sweet fleeting smiles, and looked up questioningly, as though to ask the meaning of this summons. In her own mind she was convinced that she was to be informed of Mr. Bowyer's intention to erase her name from his will, and was rejoiced that a way had been discovered by which she could still remain in the only house which seemed open to her without loss of dignity or self-respect. If once all motive for treachery were removed, surely he would learn to trust and love her again!

The lawyer looked from one to the other, trying to solve the problem of the strange task with which he had been



intrusted. Since he had seen Elaine it seemed harder than ever to perform, and he glanced at her apologetically and hemmed and hawed repeatedly before he began.

“It is Mr. Bowyer’s wish that I should inform you of—of something he has done this morning. You will, I hope, do me the justice to remember that I am acting under instructions—only under instructions.”

“Whatever it may be, we shall not blame you,” Elaine assured him, in her low, clear tones.

Mrs. Priolo looked at him with ill-repressed eagerness, as though ready to tear from his lips the news that he had to tell. She might have reminded any one of a vulture hovering over a dying man, hardly waiting for the breath to leave his body—so impatient for its ghastly meal.

The lawyer went on, nervously—

“I am not in any way responsible for it, believe me. I may think that my client is wrong, misguided, unjust even; but I have no power to enforce my opinion. Mr. Bowyer is unwell, his nerves seem utterly unstrung, and—”

“We understand all that,” interposed the housekeeper, brusquely.

“Then I will proceed at once to business. Mr. Bowyer made a will some months ago, leaving half his fortune to Mrs. Martha Priolo, his sister-in-law, and half to Miss Ellen Warde—no relative, I believe, but adopted by him about two years ago.” Pausing a moment to see if his last statement were correct, he continued, with a stiff professional gravity that he felt to be his best refuge from the unpleasantness of the situation—“This morning he has made a codicil to that will, not revoking it, but making its administration subject to a certain provision—a provision so strange, so unaccountable, that I am at a loss how best to put it into words, though I must remind you again that I am a mere machine in the matter.”

“Had you not better tell us straight out what it is?—then perhaps we can enlighten you as to its meaning,”



suggested Elaine; while Mrs. Priolo's eyes were still fixed with wild intensity on his face.

"The money is forfeited by both, and goes to different charities—I will name them, if you wish—should Mr. Bowyer not die a natural death. It is utterly absurd of course—a monomania, I should say; but you understand I am bound to repeat to you the terms of the will, according to my client's desire."

He laughed deprecatingly, but the laugh died away when no responsive amusement greeted his remarks; only an uncomfortable silence reigned.

Looking up with startled surprise, his gaze first encountered Mrs. Priolo, and so crest-fallen was her mien and so evil the expression of her face that he felt, with a man's unreasonable prejudice against an ugly woman, that his client's madness was not without method after all—that this woman might be capable of any villainy.

Then his eyes rested on Ellen Warde. She was very pale—paler than her wont—while her downcast eyes and troubled trembling mouth spoke plainly of the pain that she felt. Just such a look of woe and resignation had he seen in pictures of martyred saints; and all his sympathy was roused on her behalf.

"I am more grieved than I can say to be the bearer of such a message. No one could imagine for a moment that any aspersion was cast on you," he protested earnestly, but shrunk back appalled as, with a stifled cry, she rose and passed him to leave the room.

"Your imagination is not a very vivid one, I am afraid," said Mrs. Priolo, sharply.

Quick enough to discover that his impression of her was not a favorable one, and bitterly disappointed that all her scheming should so far have come to naught, she determined at least to vent her malice; and, as the lawyer stared at her in amazement, she added, viciously—

"You are not aware that Mr. Bowyer's life was at-



tempted only a fortnight ago; and, even if you did know, it would probably be difficult to persuade you that the young lady who has just left the room could have anything to do with it."

"It is impossible—impossible!" he asserted.

"Because she has a pretty face? Bah!"

"Because she is so gentle and refined."

"And you actually think that wicked people go about with their wickedness apparent to every one whom they meet?"—with a fine accent of scorn. "Villainy would be a very unprofitable business if that were so."

"True." Then presently, as a new objection presented itself, he asked, with an air of wonderment that was very real, "Why on earth, if this be so, does Mr. Bowyer still keep her in his house, and leave her half his fortune, even with such a condition attached?"

"He thinks it is his duty to maintain her, having once adopted her. He is ill and shaken, scarcely responsible for his actions, and requires some one to show him what he ought to do."

She looked into his face to see if she could glean any comfort from it, but it was impassible, and gave no sign of any feeling whatever.

His pride was hurt to think that he had been so deceived by a fair exterior, and he was disappointed too from a higher motive. Lawyer though he was, and versed in the ways of the world, a vein of romance ran side by side with his sterner notions, and he could not think with equanimity of so young a girl being deeply imbued with vice. What an upside-down sort of life it was after all, and how slow a man should be to judge the actions of his fellows! The man he had put down as a monomaniac, an invalid broken in mind as well as body, was in fact a Don Quixote of chivalry; and the girl he had thought of as a martyred saint was actually—



He broke off suddenly in his thoughts with a muttered exclamation.

“Will you tell him that he is mad to dream of such a thing?” begged Mrs. Priolo anxiously.

“Madame,” he returned, gravely, “I shall not presume to interfere with Mr. Bowyer’s intentions. There is a wisdom beyond the wisdom of the serpent, which you and I have yet to learn.”

Passing the astonished housekeeper with a formal bow, he too quitted the room, and she was left alone to brood over her disappointed hopes.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. BOWYER, cowering over the fire in his bedroom, half proud and half ashamed of his scheme for self-protection, was waiting anxiously to hear what effect it had had upon the two most concerned. He had instructed his lawyer to come to him directly the interview was over; therefore, when a knock came at the door, he gave permission to enter with some little alacrity. But he shrunk back into his easy-chair, and would have been only too glad to escape altogether, when he saw that it was his ward, come probably to upbraid him.

“What—what do you want?” he asked, in evident perturbation, for there was nothing he so dreaded as a “scene.” If he had reflected for a moment, he might have guessed that Elaine was the last person in the world to inflict it on him.

“May I speak to you a moment?” she said, quietly.

“I am at your disposal, of course”—with some acrimony, feeling that she had given him no choice in the matter.

“We have just been informed of your intention of leaving your fortune in two equal parts, one of which is to come to me.”



"Under certain conditions—under certain conditions."

"That was fully explained," she answered, sadly.

"Very naturally you may have taken exception to the terms of the codicil; but try to look at it for a moment from my point of view, Elaine."

"I have looked at it from every conceivable point of view."

"Remember the circumstances in which I adopted you, and that I consider myself answerable for your future fate. And, Elaine, make some allowance for my broken health, and—and the experience I have passed through lately. There are so few weapons I can wield. What else was I to do? To shield you is my duty, but must I not also protect myself?"

"I am not blaming you. I have never blamed you."

"But you look at me with those large sorrowful eyes of yours, and make me feel a perfect brute. I am one, I believe."

"You are all goodness. You have been far kinder to me than I deserve or wish. It is that of which I must complain."

"Eh? What? What?"—looking up at her in quick surprise.

Reproaches and recriminations he had expected; but apparently she intended neither. Had she merely come to thank him for not depriving her of the wealth that she felt she ought to forfeit? A hard look came into his face; he could scarcely repress a sneer. Women were all the same; they would kiss the very dust off a rich man's boots, and no insults or contumely could rouse them to retaliation or even wrath.

Elaine, hardly noticing his mood, went on calmly—

"I have accepted your kindness freely as I believe it was offered; the shelter you gave me nearly two years ago has become to me a home. It is my only home; and no one else would be kind to me but you."



“Is that all you came to say?”—in an embarrassed tone.

“No. I want to tell you that I can no longer accept that kindness, and must seek another home, unless—”

“Unless I cancel the codicil of my will?”

She shook her head impatiently.

“You have a right to make what provisions you think best—you have a right to do what you please with your own; but money should go as a blessing, not as a curse. It is a cruel gift, if an unwelcome one.”

“What do you mean?”

“I want you to erase my name from your will absolutely and forever.”

He stared at her in undisguised amazement. Was this acting or reality? He was so prone to suspect the worst of any one, and circumstances seemed to encourage rather than discountenance caution. Yet something in her attitude impressed him against his will.

“That is a strange request. Why do you urge it?”

“Because it is only so that I can remain with you at all. The gratitude and love I owe you prevent my resenting any unjust suspicion you may harbor, the good you have done me far outbalancing the evil: but don’t you understand that such patience is incompatible with dignity and self-respect if in the end I am to gain by it?”

“You think I am bribing you to be good?”—with a bitter smile.

“I am sure you mean to be generous and just; but, believe me, you will serve me best by doing as I say.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then I shall leave your house at once. A very strong-minded woman might be able to scorn the imputation of interested motives, and not care about being thought poor-spirited if she knew she was doing right; but I am not strong-minded.”

Mr. Bowyer looked thoughtfully into the fire, and pon-



dered the matter for fully five minutes without speaking. Once or twice he glanced furtively at the girl who stood there so patiently awaiting his decision, and his heart softened toward her as it always did soften when exposed to a good influence. Should he do as she suggested? Even to himself it seemed cruel and insulting to leave her money coupled with such a condition; and yet he dared not throw her penniless upon the world—it would be too heavy a responsibility for him to bear even in the grave. And then, as he had reminded her, that condition was his only protection against another such attempt upon his life.

Presently he asked her, not looking into her face—

“Can you throw any light upon—upon that painful business—the arsenic, you know?”

“I know nothing about it beyond the mere fact that I saw Mrs. Priolo place it quite out of the way in the morning, and that in the afternoon I took the milk and tea and sugar from the usual places.”

For a minute or two he waited, listening eagerly for some protestation of innocence, strongly inclined to believe in it were it forthcoming, though his mood might change when pressure was again brought to bear upon him. Perhaps Elaine guessed that, even were she to convince him, it would have merely a transitory effect; or perhaps her former unhappy experience had warned her of the futility of any protestation without proof. At any rate she remained mute.

“Suppose I alter or entirely remove that codicil?” said Mr. Bowyer, hesitatingly. “The lawyer has not left the house; and, after all, I had no right to let a morbid fear of mine destroy another’s peace.”

She drew a little nearer to him, understanding the effort it would be on his part to throw down the defense that he had erected. Though he had misjudged and doubted her so long, she had never ceased to love and thank him for



his past kindness, and was more likely to exaggerate his real goodness of heart than underrate it.

"That would not do at all," she objected, gently. "In no circumstances that seem possible at present could I accept any money from you beyond what is necessary while living as I do beneath your roof."

"Is it that you are offended—aggrieved at the wording of the codicil?"

"No; I don't think it is that. To say a thing or think a thing, it is all the same; and, as you say, you are bound to protect yourself."

He winced a little, detecting the slight inflection of contempt in her tone, and touched too by its deep sadness. If indeed she was guiltless, at least of this crime against himself, then he had been more cruel to her than any foe, and had almost better have remained quiescent on that day when he interfered to change her fate. If he could only again become opinionated and self-confident as he used to be! It were better surely to hold firmly to a wrong idea than thus waver between two opinions and gain no satisfaction from either. If she was innocent, then he had injured her beyond reparation, beyond forgiveness; while, if his suspicions were well founded, then he was an arrant fool to be impressed by a clever impersonation of injured innocence, and to feel so uncomfortable—even guilty—in her presence.

"I will think it over and let you know. I am not sure whether I have the right to leave you utterly unprovided for—destitute, in fact."

"If I do not complain, surely no one else has the right to do so."

"Well, I will see—I will see. If you meet Mr. Levison, will you ask him to come to me for a moment?"

She bowed her head in assent, and was leaving the room, when a sudden thought struck her, and she turned round again and addressed him.



"Remember," she said, impressively, "that if, in opposition to my wish, you leave me any money, either directly or indirectly, you can not force me to accept it. I should simply disappear, and the money would lie idle until it lapsed or reverted to the Crown. I don't know what is the technical expression."

"That is a very fair imitation of it."

"And," she went on, "remember that to serve you so without hope or expectation of reward is the only way in which I can assure you of my gratitude and rewin your love—your confidence. Give me at least a chance."

He kept his face averted to hide a moisture which had risen to his eyes at the pathos and yearning in her voice. When he turned again, she was gone, and the door drawn to behind her.

The tears were in her eyes too, and her mouth still trembled, as, going round the corner of the stairs, she encountered the lawyer coming up.

He stood on one side to let her pass.

"Mr. Bowyer wishes to speak to you," she said.

"You have been with him?"

"Yes." A sudden impulse moved her to confide in him and seek his aid. He could help her if he would, and she was so sorely in need of help. "I have been asking him to leave my name out of his will altogether," she said, speaking very rapidly to conceal the tremor in her voice. "I do not want his money; and—will you try to persuade him that it would be bestowed more judiciously and received more gratefully elsewhere?"

"I am so utterly in the dark in this matter that I fear my advice would have little or no weight."

"Still you must have guessed something of the truth. Mr. Bowyer suspects me of having tried to poison him, and, in spite of that, thinks it right to leave me half his fortune."

"Heaping coals of fire upon your head, in fact."



“Oh, no, no! He does not dream of that. He is goodness itself; but he will not understand that I take nothing from him while he considers me capable of such baseness, such an outrageous crime.”

“No one could believe it of you. It is too ridiculous, too monstrous.”

She looked up at him gratefully, still seeing everything through a mist of tears.

“It is kind of you to think well of me; but Mr. Bowyer has some cause for suspicion. I do not blame him, for he has been the kindest of friends to me; and there is something truly noble in the way in which he persists in being good to me and forgiving me, although believing me to be unworthy.”

Mr. Levison, studying her with an intent expression in his dark keen eyes, and crediting unhesitatingly what she said, thought that her character too was not devoid of nobility and generosity. He felt remorseful now that he had listened even for a moment to the housekeeper's malicious words; truth and ingenuousness were written so plainly on her face, he ought not to have doubted for a moment.

“Yet, as you are innocent, why should you hesitate to take the money to which you certainly have some claim? Why should you suffer through a mistaken idea that would, I am confident, have never arisen if Mr. Bowyer had been in perfect health?”

He spoke with persuasive earnestness. It aroused his indignation that this girl should deny herself to enrich that objectionable woman whom he had just left, or some charity in which she had no concern.

Elaine smiled sadly and shook her head.

“I do not care for money. It is no deprivation to me at all. Never having possessed a fortune, I shall never miss it.”

“I must remind you however that, putting luxuries out



of the question, there is a great difference between the comfort you enjoy at present and absolute penury."

"I dare say," she returned, indifferently; "but I am not afraid of being poor. That—as things are now—seems a minor evil."

"But things, I hope, will not always be as they are now; and, Miss Warde, will you remember that I will do anything I can for you? If you want me, telegraph at any time, and I will come at once to right the wrong that is being done you now."

She looked up at him gratefully, her heart too full for speech, then passed on her way down-stairs, while the lawyer proceeded to Mr. Bowyer's room.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

It was Sunday afternoon, and throughout the house reigned that strange stillness which is suggestive of and inseparable from the day. The servants had walked over to Greathaven to church, and no one was in the kitchen except Mrs. Priolo, who dozed before the fire, where she had placed herself to watch the water boil for Mr. Bowyer's tea. Life seemed very pleasant to the housekeeper just then. All her schemes had succeeded, and she could look forward with complacency to a prosperous future, as mistress of her employer's fortune at his death. For Mr. Bowyer had assented to Elaine's proposition; a new will was made, in which Mrs. Priolo was nominated sole legatee. So she dozed and dreamed by the fire in a happy security which she had no idea could ever be assailed. A ring at the front door half roused her; but not till it was repeated did she remember that the servants were out and she must answer it. Then, getting up hastily, she ran up-stairs.

It was Colonel Severn; and with a bland smile she was



ushering him into the sitting-room, when he stopped her peremptorily.

“It is you I wish to see. Where can I speak to you undisturbed?”

A little startled, yet too secure in her own mind to be actually alarmed, she led the colonel to the kitchen, the fire being out in her own room.

“Well, sir, what can I do for you?” she asked, somewhat defiantly, having dusted a chair and placed it for him.

Taking no notice of her question, he entered at once upon the subject that he had come to discuss.

“Some time ago—nearly three weeks ago, I suppose—Mr. Bowyer accidentally took some poison that must, it was imagined, have been given him in a cup of tea that he drank that afternoon.”

“Made and given by Miss Ellen Warde,” put in the housekeeper, quickly.

“So far you are correct; but one fact you have withheld—that the poison was placed in the sugar-basin by you, and that consequently it was not Miss Warde, but you who were responsible for what occurred.”

The woman had turned ashy white, and clutched the table for support, yet, overcome as she was, she made a desperate effort to defend herself.

“It is false—false, I tell you!” she gasped, convulsively.

“It is true—perfectly true—and you know it!” he retorted, calmly. “Shall I go on?”

“You can say what you choose; I have no one to protect me, or you would not dare to attack me so. Am I to be made the scapegoat for Ellen Warde’s sins?”

“Keep Miss Warde’s name from your lips, if you please, or I will not answer for my patience. It is useless to deny anything I say. You have proofs to fight against—not mere idle accusation. When Mr. Bowyer was so ill



that you supposed him dying, you gave him a tumbler of what you asserted to be hot brandy and water; but the cook noticed that there was no smell of spirits, and tasted what was left. It was merely hot water and salt, which you gave him as an emetic."

"It saved his life"—doggedly.

"At that time no one knew that he was poisoned, so that your acting on that knowledge alone would damn you in any court of justice."

"It was because I suspected her."

"Hush!"—sternly. "Such prevarications and denials do no good; they only injure you. Further, you were seen immediately afterward to go and empty the contents of the sugar-basin and put fresh sugar in it. Are you satisfied now that I know all? A detective has been here ever since, and, connecting several incidents, each insignificant in itself, but incontrovertible when taken with the rest, has the whole chain of evidence against you complete. He is here now to act on any instructions that Mr. Bowyer may give him."

The woman fell upon her knees with a sob, and covered her face with her dress, fighting no longer against what she felt to be stronger than any defense she could invent.

"On my honor, sir, I never meant to do him any harm—I swear it!" she protested. "I only wanted to frighten him, to—to—"

"To throw suspicion on to Miss Warde. I know that too. That in itself is a criminal offense."

"Forgive me—forgive me! I never thought—never realized what I was doing. I'll never lift finger against her again. I'll beg her pardon on my knees; I'll do anything you tell me—promise anything—sign anything—if you will only let me off."

"It is not for me to judge you; it is Mr. Bowyer who will decide whether you deserve forgiveness or not."

"You will not tell him?"—in a tone of agonized alarm,



“How can I do otherwise? Can I let Miss Warde remain under the suspicion of having attempted murder?”

“Not murder—oh, good heavens, not murder! You don’t really believe I meant that?”—horror unmistakably stamped on her face.

“No, I do not believe it—not because you assert your innocence so loudly, but because I happen to be aware of the conversation between you and the chemist of whom you purchased the poison. Shall I repeat it to you?”

She gazed at him in speechless, hopeless amazement; and he went on remorselessly, feeling that every blow he struck was only avenging a slight part of the pain she had caused to the woman he loved.

“You said you had a horror of poison, and, under cover of this pretense, found out from him exactly how much it would take to kill a man and how much merely to make him ill; but, in your excess of caution, you neglected to elicit from him the information that a much less quantity can be taken with impunity by a sick person than one in full health and strength. Of being a murderess in intent I do not accuse you; but you very nearly made yourself liable to a charge of manslaughter.”

Alarmed by the gravity of his manner as much as by his words, Mrs. Priolo could not restrain a shrill scream. Utterly broken down now, and at his mercy, she was rocking herself backward and forward in the chair into which she had fallen, incapable of thought or resistance to his will.

The sound arrested the attention of Ellen Warde, who happened to be on the higher flight of stairs almost exactly above the open kitchen-door. She thought some one was hurt, and ran down at once to see; but she started back in such uncontrollable surprise, as she saw the colonel standing there in an attitude of denunciation and Mrs. Priolo in tears, that the former stepped forward quickly to explain.

“We have solved the mystery of the arsenic more fully and circumstantially than I had ever hoped. This wretched



woman placed the poison in the sugar-basin with the deliberate intention of throwing the guilt upon you."

Ellen looked from one to the other in breathless agitation, and could not speak at once—her surprise was too intense, her relief too great. Her delight at being exonerated for the time overwhelmed the feeling of disgusted horror which Severn had expected her to display toward the woman who had acted so wicked and treacherous a part. Presently she said—

"Does Mr. Bowyer know? Have you told him?"

"No; but I will do so now."

The housekeeper jumped up and caught hold of Ellen's soft black gown.

"If he does, I will tell all I know!" she hissed out spitefully, as a last desperate chance of escape.

Severn did not hear the threat, it having been uttered in a whisper, and was at the door—almost on the threshold—when a slight touch upon his sleeve brought him back at once.

"What is it?" he asked, gently.

"Must you—is it absolutely necessary to let Mr. Bowyer know what she has done?"

"I could not do otherwise; it is due to him and, what is more, to yourself."

"But if I waive my right?"—looking earnestly into his face.

"Why should you spare her? Has she ever spared you?"

She turned away her head, ashamed to meet the look of loving admiration that he had cast upon her.

"It is not that; it is not from any feeling of magnanimity or mercy," she murmured, in a low abashed voice.

"Then what is it?"

"From fear. She can injure me—oh, more fatally than you can imagine possible!—if she is driven to desperation."



“But surely you don’t wish her to go scot-free, so that if she chooses she may be at liberty to continue her cruel schemes against you!”

“Is there no middle course?”

“None that I can see. You are upset now, naturally, and incapable of judging for yourself—let me judge for you. Nothing that she could bring against you could be so terrible as the suspicion of having tried to poison your best friend, your benefactor.”

She shrunk back, silenced. She felt that she could no longer struggle against the inevitable. Things must take their course, unhelped and unhindered by her interference. Yet—Heaven help her!—how should she face her lover when he had heard all that Mrs. Priolo could tell?

The housekeeper had been hanging anxiously on every word in their low-toned conversation. Her fate as well as Elaine’s was trembling in the balance—they would stand or fall together; it would almost console her for her own loss if this girl were seen at last in her true colors. For a moment she wavered, half meaning to let matters remain as they were; but finally greed of wealth conquered malice, and she determined to make one more effort not to let slip the fortune which was almost in her grasp. If Ellen were exonerated and she not implicated, she would still have half Mr. Bowyer’s money and be no worse off than she had hoped to be a little time ago; and—who knew?—he might delay, and die before another will was made.

She held up her head and stood upright again, feeling that, with Ellen Warde to back her up, she might dictate her own terms.

“There is a middle course. Miss Warde shall be exonerated completely if you will let me do it in my own way; and I promise I will never try to injure her again.”

The colonel looked doubtfully at Elaine. The sudden brightening of her face showed that to her this was a wel-



come suggestion; so he could not indignantly oppose it, as he desired.

“How could you do that without laying the blame on an innocent person?”

“I shall put it down to the carelessness of a servant, only now confessed. There is nothing culpable in carelessness, especially when freely admitted, as I shall represent it to have been. I know Mr. Bowyer well enough to be sure that he will never allude again to a subject necessarily so painful—that he will not even ask me to name which of them it is, and that he will forgive her at once, with no after-feeling of resentment. As for the falsehood—that will be mine, not yours; and I don’t suppose it will lie very heavy on my conscience.”

“Since you hold such opinions, how are we to be sure of your good faith in the matter; and how can I know beyond all doubt that Miss Warde will be free from any annoyance—any persecutions from you in the future?”

“I will write a full confession of my action in the matter of the arsenic, and Miss Warde shall make use of it if ever she has reason to complain. Secret for secret; we shall be quits then, and neither free to harm the other.”

Colonel Severn looked displeased. It jarred upon him to hear this woman claim an equality with Elaine on such a score. Rather a thousand times would he have had her at open enmity than have won her silence on such terms. But a second furtive glance at Elaine decided him. He saw that it would be for her happiness were he to consent; and so, sad at heart and sorely against his will, he consented.

Mrs. Priolo at once fetched pen, ink, and paper, and set about fulfilling her part of the contract, the colonel standing over her and insisting on a full confession of the motives that had moved her as well as an admission of the actual deed committed. When it was written and signed,



he and Elaine witnessed it. Then he put it into his pocket.

"I will send this," he explained to Mrs. Priolo, "to Mr. Levison to-night—he is my own lawyer as well as Mr. Bowyer's—and I shall give him minute instructions as to when and under what conditions he may use it. So long as you do your duty to your employer and do not harass Miss Warde in any way, you will be as safe as though you had never written it."

The housekeeper smiled a little disdainfully, having now entirely recovered her self-possession, and resolved to make the best of an unfortunate *denouement*.

"I will not thank you for your forbearance, because I know perfectly well you would have shown me no mercy if it had been convenient to do so." Then, suddenly returning to her ordinary tone of bland obsequiousness, she added, "I will go now and tell my story to Mr. Bowyer; you may follow in about ten minutes, Miss Ellen."

"Do you think she is to be trusted?" asked Severn, when they were left alone.

"Yes, I think so. You see, it is to her interest to be true to her word."

"She ought to have been unhesitatingly denounced. I wish," he said, earnestly, "that there was no need of concealment in your case—that you could face the matter boldly, and take the risk."

"It is impossible. I might have done so once, but it is too late now."

"I would stand by you—through anything," he pleaded.

But she only shook her head in a way that showed the utter hopelessness of all discussion.

A few minutes later he left; and at the expiration of the appointed time Elaine repaired with a beating heart to the sitting-room.

She opened the door, and as she did so Mrs. Priolo brushed past her hastily and went out.



That she had done thoroughly what she had undertaken to do there was no doubt from the reception that Elaine received.

Weak as he was, Mr. Bowyer rose from his chair, and tottered forward to meet her with outstretched arms; and the next moment Elaine was lying across his breast, weeping joyfully as she listened to his terms of endearment and the accents of self-reproach in his voice as he begged for her forgiveness and love.

She was his daughter now indeed, and all the dearer for the estrangement that there had been between them. No suspicion would ever sunder them again.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

It was a very different Elaine, radiant as well as lovely, with a faint rose-color in her usually pale cheeks, and nothing of the Sphinx—nothing indeed pertaining to sadness—about her, that stood before George Severn a week later, her hand outstretched in friendly greeting, her eyes smiling happily into his own. But the light faded somewhat from her face as he told her why he had sought her, and she realized how long it must be before they met again.

It appeared that he had invested some of his savings in houses and mortgages on houses in India, and that now, it being advisable for him to realize the money and transfer it to his account at home, his presence was absolutely needed there, as some of the transactions were intricate.

“I don’t want to go in the very least,” he said, dolefully. “Indeed my first impulse was a very unbusiness-like one. I felt inclined to risk the loss of half or even all the money, so that I might remain here in Littlehaven.”

The attractions of the little village being so very few, Elaine could not but apply the meaning in his speech to herself; her color deepened and her eyelids fell.

“I was so heartily sick of India before I left it. I



should never have remained there so long had it not been for my son; it is for his sake I go back now. I feel that it is his money as much as mine which is at stake, and that I have no right to let it go without a struggle."

"Will Mr. Severn go with you?"

The colonel shook his head.

"He is coming here to study with his tutor. You will be kind to him, will you not, while he is at the Abbey? I should like to know that he is here, though being so near you will scarcely tend to cure him of that which sent him away before."

"Familiarity may breed contempt"—blushing brightly.

"Not in your case. But he is very young, and perhaps, if he sees there is no hope—"

"He knows that now. He is very young, as you say; of course he will grow wiser and forget."

He looked at her keenly, trying to detect if there was any hidden meaning, any bitterness in her speech. If there was, she hid it effectually, and met his glance bravely.

"And you are quite happy now?" he asked, still gazing searchingly into her face.

"As happy as I shall ever be. I can't tell you how good Mr. Bowyer is to me, how penitent for his doubt. I really believe"—smiling—"he has gone to the opposite extreme, and suspects me now of being perfect."

Severn smiled too. If that were folly—as her manner seemed to infer—then he knew another fool who did not even desire to be cured of his foolishness. However he might deplore the necessity for concealment which overshadowed her life, he was positive that in that forced secrecy there was no cause for shame. She must be bearing the burden of another's sin, for he could not meet the clear gaze of her sweet gray eyes and believe that they had any reason to droop abashed.

"And Mrs. Priolo—does she keep her promise?"

"Most faithfully. When she is obliged to speak to me,



she does so with civility; but she avoids me as much as possible, and that pleases me best."

"And Mr. Bowyer has never alluded to the matter of the arsenic again?"

"Never. I can't help fancying he has guessed a little of the truth, for he is very stiff and reserved with Mrs. Priolo, and she is most subdued. It may be that he is only angry with her for encouraging him in his doubts of me."

"She is a wicked designing woman. I scarcely like leaving you with her."

"I am quite safe," she assured him, earnestly. "So long as Mr. Bowyer lives she can not harm me; and—and, if he dies—"

It was on Severn's lips to answer her with a warm protestation of his love, and the care with which he would always cherish her, if only she would consent to become his wife; but he restrained himself by a strong effort. So long as Charlie loved her, and retained a hope of winning her at last, he could not—would not speak.

"I wish," he said, presently, "that you had some friend, some woman-friend, in whom you could confide, who could give you the help of sympathy at least. There is Miss Featherstone—I know you would like her if you knew her. If opportunity offers, will you promise me to make her acquaintance?"

The promise was somewhat reluctantly given. She had her own reasons for not wishing to have any friends; but how could she refuse him anything he asked her now when he was going away? There was nothing else she could do to prove her gratitude for all his kindness, and the practical aid that had given such a new and happy turn to the circumstances of her life.

How long and dreary the days would be while he was away! To do anything to please him would lighten them a little; yet it seemed only a faint glimmer in the darkness that loomed ahead.



“It is time that I was going. I must say good-bye.”

She looked up, startled and disturbed. In the last supreme moment of their parting no disguise seemed possible; and, as her eyes met his, each read in the other's the whole truth. Such a yearning, grieving expression crossed her face that it required almost superhuman resolution on Severn's part not to take her in his arms and console her with a promise of a happier future. Never had she looked so beautiful as now, with the love-light in her eyes half drowned by the overwhelming sorrow, the sweet tremulous mouth curved downward in distress, showing berry-red against the pallor that spread slowly from brow to chin as her emotion grew.

He made a half-involuntary move forward, then stopped as suddenly, while she stood waiting. It was the hardest task he had ever set himself, during a long self-sacrificing life, to watch the half-expectant look fade away gradually, and see it replaced by a proud shyness, as, recalled to herself by the very sharpness of the pang, she understood that they were to be to each other friends as formerly, but, ah, no more! She gave him her hand with an expression of regret which, though exactly suited to the occasion, betrayed nothing of the agony of her despair.

“We shall miss you very much,” she said, gravely.

It was impossible to pretend indifference; it would have gone against her nature, being in no way coquettish, even the innocent gayety of girlhood having disappeared forever when her sister died.

All that terrible time was recalled vividly to her now; and she wondered at herself for forgetting and having been led away by the will-o'-the-wisp Hope, though only for a moment. It was far better as it was; for, had the choice been left to her, she might not have been able to summon strength to do the right. Surely it was happiness enough for her to know that she was loved by the one man in the world whose love she could have prized!



Almost simultaneously they said "Good-bye."

A cold piercing wind was whistling through the trees, and blew down a shower of leaves wet with the rain of the previous night. One fell against Elaine's cheek, and struck her with a keen sense of chilliness. It seemed to her then as though she had been growing colder and colder all the while, and that the culminating point was reached only then, as Severn turned abruptly and strode away, while she was left alone, with the hand that he had dropped clasped tightly in the other, and his word of farewell sounding mournfully in her ears.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

EIGHT or nine months passed with little or no change in the village of Littlehaven. At the Dower House matters were exactly as they had been before Mrs. Priolo's machinations wrought such distressful excitement. Mr. Bowyer was perhaps a little stronger and not quite so nervous since the folly of his suspicion of Elaine had been shown to him so clearly. His ward was more to him than ever—he could scarcely bear her to be out of his sight; and his sister-in-law was relegated to her old place as housekeeper, she never venturing to remind him of the connection that she could also claim.

Mrs. Priolo was in reality a clever woman, though she herself had begun to doubt it after the failure of her schemes. She was always ready to accept the inevitable with a good grace; and, angry as she was at her own imprudence in going so far as she had done in the matter of the arsenic, when with words and looks she might have won her cause without risk of detection, she still managed to appear resigned to her present position.

"Secret for secret," she had said to Elaine that day when her duplicity was discovered; but she knew well that the value of each was not equal. The confession she had



made and signed would be of no use against her when once Mr. Bowyer was dead; while only after that event could she use her knowledge of the Sydney tragedy with good effect, either to satisfy her revenge or sell her silence, if that should prove the more profitable course. At present she was content and more hopeful than might have been expected.

Mr. Bowyer had not destroyed his former will in which she was named as sole heiress. He meant to do so at the earliest opportunity; but, with the usual procrastination in such matters, the natural reluctance to admit the need of hurry, he had delayed to send for the lawyer to draw up another, and in the meantime kept intact the former one, with what idea he himself could not have told.

Though she wondered at his carelessness, Mrs. Priolo was not sufficiently quixotic to think it her duty to speak to him about it; and Elaine was the least likely person in the world to remind him that her interests were at stake. Indeed she scarcely thought about the matter, so happy was she in having recovered her old place in her guardian's affections. She had almost forgotten the great terror of her life, or only recalled it now and then as something very far away and rendered indistinct by distance. Another sorrow seemed more real because more recent, perhaps because more human, more natural to her age. She was very young, and her youth was reasserting itself, that time of terrible trial during which it seemed to leave her altogether being gradually forgotten. When George Severn went, she had felt heart-broken for awhile; but she had the knowledge of his love to sustain her, and deep down in her heart was the hope that he would come back to her and all would be well between them in the end. How some of the obstacles were to be surmounted she did not know; but faith is sometimes stronger than reason, especially in a woman's heart.

Early in the spring Charlie Severn had come to the Ab-



bey with his tutor to be coached for his examinations. At first he felt some shyness in going to the Dower House, but by and by that feeling died away as the love that had prompted it also died a natural death.

Elaine was somewhat amused and somewhat sore to see how, when he had been at Littlehaven for about a month, he suddenly developed an attachment for gentle Mary Featherstone, the vicar's daughter, and afterward was seldom far away from her side.

At first he received little or no encouragement. The girl knew of his former passion, and doubted the depth of his feelings, which could so lightly change; nor was Elaine much inclined to sympathize when, in boyish fashion, he came and confided his ill-success to her. She could not forget how a year before he had protested eternal faithfulness to herself and almost moved her to consent, so well and earnestly had he pleaded. Were all men so? She knew they were not, yet in her momentary bitterness felt impelled to doubt all on account of the fickleness of one. But the bitterness was only momentary, and on second thoughts she was unselfishly glad that he had recovered from his disappointment, and was ready to listen to any amount of foolish rhapsodies about his later love.

One day he introduced them to each other, and after that a rapid friendship grew up between the girls, at which the young man felt a little aggrieved. It seemed to him that he was making no progress at all, and that since these two had known each other he was left completely in the cold. One day he betrayed his jealousy of her to Elaine, and she resolved on the first opportunity to speak to Mary, and see if he had any chance.

That same afternoon the vicar's daughter came to the Dower House. The two girls often visited the poor people in the village; and Elaine, who was in her bedroom, hastily put on her hat before descending, thinking they were to go together then.



But this was not the case, as was hastily explained. There was typhoid fever in the village, and Miss Featherstone had come to warn Elaine against going thither until the doctor pronounced it once more safe.

Mr. Bowyer was evidently terribly nervous at the news, and with rather suspicious eagerness asked Miss Featherstone if she had been in the village lately.

“I have not been for several days; and there was no danger until yesterday. A poor woman with a baby, on her way to Greathaven, was taken ill and fainted on the road. She seemed so ill that some people took her in and sent for a doctor, who saw at once what was the matter. She died this morning; and now the child has it.”

“How sad—how terribly sad!” cried Elaine.

But Mr. Bowyer, more alive to the possible danger to themselves, called for Mrs. Priolo and gave her directions to use every precaution in the matter, which the housekeeper seemed only too ready to fulfill. She went away at once to order the servants not to go near the village on any pretext; and, as Mr. Bowyer seemed disinclined for further conversation, the two girls strolled out of doors.

“How sad—how unfortunate it is!” said Elaine presently, unable to forget what she had heard. This will put a stop to our visiting for some time, and the poor people will miss us, I am afraid. We could always help them a little, if not much; and they knew we were sorry for them—and even sympathy comforts a little.”

“I shall go as usual,” said Mary, quietly.

“You will go?”

“Of course. I am my father’s curate, you know. He will be amongst them always, and the risk is scarcely increased by my going too. That was really why I came to-day, for we may not meet again for some time—it would not be safe for us to meet.”

Elaine’s blank look of disappointment betrayed something of what she felt; and Mary understood, knowing



how she herself would rebel were she commanded to stand aside unhelpful while others suffered.

“You see, dear, it is so different with you,” she urged, gently. “Mr. Bowyer is naturally afraid of so terrible a disease. Your first duty is to him. Then there would be the risk to the servants.”

Elaine nodded, but did not speak at once.

“I shall miss you dreadfully!” she said at last.

“And I you. What friends we have become, and in so short a time! Why would you never let me know you before?”

“I had a reason—a very strong reason, you may be sure. I dare say I am wrong now; but I promised—”

She broke off shyly, but Mary completed the sentence for her with a smile at the other's so palpable confusion.

“You promised Colonel Severn. I know he was very anxious we should be friends, because you were too much alone. When is the colonel coming back, Elaine?”

The old assumed name had gradually fallen into disuse, Mr. Bowyer having insensibly reverted to the one by which he knew her first, while Mary Featherstone had never heard her called by any other.

“I do not know,” was the answer, given almost in a whisper.

“Somehow I fancy it will be soon. Before he went he was talking to me of his wish to secure every one a happy Christmas. Last winter he was almost a stranger here, and had been so long in India that he had forgotten English customs; but this year was to be very different.”

“And now this sickness has come!”

“It will be stamped out, I hope. Every effort is being made to prevent the infection from spreading.”

“And Mary,” said Elaine, suddenly giving the conversation a new turn, “does Charlie Severn approve of your going amongst these people now?”



“What is it to him?”—tossing her head, but blushing in spite of her simulated disdain.

“You know how much. He is very fond of you, Mary.”

“This summer he has seemed so. Last summer it was you he found so attractive.”

“A boy’s fancy—nothing else indeed.”

“Then how can I hope to be anything more? If you were forgotten, how could I hope to be remembered?”

“It is so different indeed! You he loves sincerely, with a man’s deep unchanging passion. Won’t you believe in him?”

Mary looked up, a light—half-dawning love, half merry mockery—in her eyes.

“Are you so anxious to be my mother-in-law?” she said, audaciously, then almost in the same breath repented, as gradually over Elaine’s pale pained face a crimson flush spread and deepened in intensity when the full meaning of the words came home to her.

“Forgive me! I ought not to have said it. You are not very angry—are you?”

Elaine shook her head and tried to smile, but without success. It was a subject about which she never dared to think, much less speak, and she could not bring herself to deny the charge laughingly, as another girl might have done. Her whole life had been too serious for her rightly to understand such badinage.

“I should like you to be happy—happier than I can ever be,” she said at last; and so much was implied in her tones, more to be felt than comprehended, that Mary was sobered at once.

They talked of other things then; but, when the evening shadows fell and it was time to part, Elaine made one more appeal.

“You won’t see Mr. Severn for some time, I am afraid, if you are going to put yourself in quarantine, unless he



declines to regard anything of the sort," she observed, thoughtfully.

Instantly all Mary's real liking for the young fellow who aspired to be her lover was apparent; the tears came into her pretty eyes, and she looked pleadingly into her friend's face.

"Oh, Elaine, don't let him come near us on any account! Tell him it won't be for long, and that I am not afraid—people who are not afraid never take infection. Don't—don't let him come!"

"Leave some nice message to keep him good and amenable to reason. That is the very least that you can do"—speaking quietly, but with insistence.

"Then"—desperately—"tell him I will listen to all he has to say when this is over."

Elaine stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"After all," Mary went on as though excusing herself for having at last relented, "I can't blame him for loving you first. Who could help loving you?"—with a wistful, almost worshiping look at the sweet face at her side. To her it had always seemed as the face of an angel—some one set apart by a mysterious sign or seal from other women. Had she heard all Elaine's story, she would have known that it was a doubtful good to be so above feminine weakness and frivolities, as by the same token she was debarred from many real if simple pleasures.

Elaine attempted no reply—none seemed to her necessary; and she was a woman who could remain silent without appearing awkward or ungracious. A moment later they said good-bye, and she went on alone to the house, thinking how much lonelier it would seem without a friend, now that she had once indulged in the luxury of having one.

It was a luxury, but one that she had felt from the first she ought not to wish for, still less ever possess, for no pleasure she could confer would compensate for the pain



that might be inflicted in the future. Some day her identity with Elaine Warrington, the quondam actress and suspected murderess, might be discovered; and, if once again she had to stand upon her trial, she would rather bear it alone, with no thought of the trouble she might be to others to undermine her strength. It was with that idea that she had held aloof and refused to make friends with any one at first; and often still her heart reproached her for allowing herself to be loved, and she wept because she was fain to render love in return.

Only a year before she had determined that, when Mr. Bowyer died, even if she were still undetected, she would of her own free will give herself up, and let justice take its course, for no actual suffering could be worse, she felt assured, than this horrible suspense; but now it appeared that for the sake of others she must keep silent. The overstrained nerves must bear their burden of anxiety until exposure was forced upon her and choice was no longer possible. As it was, she felt that she had no right to bring such shame upon those who had clasped her hand in friendship, being ignorant of the truth.

It was quite dark as she reached the house—in November night comes so suddenly sometimes, and it had been a cloudy, stormy day.

Just as she was going in a footfall behind her caused her to turn round, and she saw a short figure hurrying to the kitchen door. A thick shawl enveloped head and shoulders; but Elaine guessed at once who it was.

It was Jane, the little housemaid. Her mother lived in the village; and Elaine felt convinced that, impelled by real anxiety or perhaps from some more trivial reason, the girl had been to visit her, in defiance of the order given only that afternoon.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

By a strange unhappy chance the unfortunate woman who was the means of bringing typhoid to Littlehaven had been taken in by Jane's mother, and, though she herself did not catch the fell disease, her daughter was not to escape the almost inevitable consequences of her stolen visit home. In less than a fortnight unmistakable symptoms declared themselves; but, before the doctor had seen her, Elaine, always prompt to help when help was needed, had been to the sick-room, and afterward would not be sent away. No one else was willing to nurse the poor girl, and the doctor was at last fain to consent.

The two sides of the house were kept entirely separate, as Mr. Bowyer was terribly nervous, and the housekeeper encouraged rather than sought to calm his fears; so Elaine performed her self-imposed task alone and unaided.

It was no want of care or skill that caused her non-success. The disease was of a most virulent type, and the absence of hope which is characteristic of the lower classes had from the first militated against the girl's recovery. The doctor once declared, with somewhat natural indignation, that she was dying because she had not sufficient pluck to live.

And so it happened that some ten days later, when the violence of the attack had expended itself, and nothing was wanted but careful nursing and the patient courage of endurance, Jane died.

Elaine was terribly grieved. She had tried so hard to save her, and the disappointment, combined with the fatigue she had undergone, utterly prostrated her at first; but a few days' rest restored her, and then she began to feel the loneliness of her position, for she was still in quarantine and living her life sorely alone.



Early one morning, she was surprised to receive a summons from Mr. Bowyer. She had taken every precaution, using all the disinfectants the doctor gave her with the greatest exactitude; but he had not yet accorded her permission to mingle with the others, and she knew that Mr. Bowyer was more than ordinarily nervous.

After some hesitation she went over to his room and knocked at the door.

In a very weak and quavering voice he bade her enter; but she only opened the door and stood on the threshold.

He was in bed, and looking unnaturally flushed and excited as he beckoned to her to come nearer.

"I don't think it is quite safe," she demurred; "the doctor said I must wait a little longer before I went near anybody who was at all afraid of infection."

"I—I think," gasped the old man, painfully, "it is too late for any fear of that sort. I think I have taken the disease already."

In a moment she sprung forward and peered anxiously into the poor thin face; she laid her hand gently against his—it was burning, and at the contact of her cool fingers a convulsive shivering fit ensued.

Not a doubt was in her mind but that he was right in his surmises; but she spoke to him cheerfully, and did all she could to relieve him, her late experience standing her in good stead.

A messenger was dispatched immediately for the doctor, and when he came his opinion confirmed the fears of both. His expression was unusually grave, and Ellen saw that he considered the case a critical one.

"I will telegraph for a hospital nurse from town," he said, as he was leaving the room.

"Don't you think me capable of nursing him?" asked Elaine.

"I think you more capable than many a certificated woman," he answered, warmly, having conceived a sin-



cere admiration for her during Jane's illness; "but I fear you are not strong enough to undertake another case so soon after the last, unless you can get some one to help you."

"Mrs. Priolo would do that, I am sure. Mr. Bowyer has a natural dislike to having strangers about him," answered Elaine, laying her hand with a gentle reassuring pressure upon the sick man's forehead.

"That would do capitally of course, if you are really equal to the task."

"I am equal to it."

"Then we will consider it settled."

When, after giving the necessary directions, the doctor had left, and Mr. Bowyer was lying back quietly on his cool pillows, his eyes closed, though he was not actually asleep, Elaine went down-stairs to find the housekeeper and secure her co-operation.

She was in the kitchen, and looked up in evident terror as the girl came in.

"Is it true about Mr. Bowyer?" she asked, quickly.

"Quite true. I am afraid he is going to be very ill indeed. Already he is terribly weak, and the fever very high."

"Are you wise to come straight from him to me?" asked Mrs. Priolo, sharply, recoiling as the girl advanced.

Elaine looked a little surprised.

"Does it matter?" she asked. "You will help me to nurse him, of course."

"I!"—not concealing her dismay at the idea.

"Are you afraid? I don't think you need be. If you were predisposed to take it, you would do so, as he has done, without being actually exposed to the infection."

She spoke so calmly that Mrs. Priolo was ashamed to admit her unwillingness, though inwardly she had determined that nothing should induce her to run such a risk.



“You are quite right, I am sure; and my natural place is at his side.”

“I was sure you would think so”—quietly.

“But,” continued the woman, hastily, “it is impossible. I have some business in London which must be done—I heard about it only this morning. I should lose every farthing I possess if I did not go.”

Elaine smiled contemptuously, not attempting to disguise her disbelief in the hastily invented excuse.

“Have you considered that, if Mr. Bowyer is displeased at your absence, you may lose more than you would save by going now?”

The woman darted an angry look at Elaine, but remained sullenly silent.

Elaine thought of the blow that her desertion at such a time would be to the sick man above, and went on in gentler accents—

“Even if the money is not sufficient inducement for you to remain, you must surely remember his invariable kindness to you these last ten years. It would break his heart if you left him now, and for such a reason.”

“I am the best judge of my own actions. I tell you it is impossible I should stay”—sulkily.

“Besides,” continued the girl, with patient persuasiveness, “no one could nurse him better than you; he is accustomed to you, and seemed so pleased when I assured him he should not have a professional nurse—only you and I would be with him.”

“You should have consulted me before you made any such rash promise. Of course a professional nurse is the proper thing. Anything else would be simple madness—dangerous to all of us alike. Miss Ellen, for Heaven’s sake don’t come so near!” she broke off excitedly, as the girl moved a little nearer to try one more appeal.

Elaine drew back with a deep sigh, convinced that any further effort would be useless. The woman’s selfish fear



was apparent, and nothing she could urge would avail since the argument of the money had not moved her.

That Mrs. Priolo considered herself quite safe in that particular she did not know, nor that she had already contemplated departure before Mr. Bowyer's illness brought matters to a climax. As to the money, it was already left to her, and it was unlikely he would be able to make a new will now; while, even were he to do so, she arranged in her own mind another course of action that would be equally profitable to herself.

The cook came in at that moment, and Elaine turned to her, and gained the promise of her assistance. She would do everything possible to help that did not necessitate her going into the sick-room. And with this Elaine resolved to be contented, knowing how the presence of any stranger would fret the invalid and increase his fever. What she had done once, surely she could do again!

Having made her arrangements, she returned to Mr. Bowyer's room. He was lying in the same attitude as when she left, but opened his eyes when she came in and smiled. She sat down beside him, and, pouring some lavender-water over her hand, passed it through his hair with a gentle caressing movement which soothed his inquietude.

Presently he asked after Mrs. Priolo; and she told him that the housekeeper had been called away to London on important affairs, but that the cook would help her as far as she was able.

He did not answer at once, but after a little while he said, in low sad tones which showed that he too was not deceived—

“ ‘The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling.’ ” Then he added—so long afterward that she thought he had fallen asleep in the midst of his unfinished sentence—  
“ You are indeed my daughter, Elaine. I bless the day when I took you to my heart.”



The quick tears came into her eyes. For anything she had suffered at his hands, for all the misery of those days when she had been under a cloud and separated from him through his own weakness and another's malice, she was amply repaid. To know that he loved her better even than of old, and that she only could be of use to him in this his great emergency, filled her with a grateful joy.

Never thinking of the danger, only of the compensation that had come after so much pain, she stooped and pressed her cool soft lips to his thin dry ones, only wishing that so, with a kiss, she might impart some of her vitality to him, even if she paid the forfeit of her life.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

CIRCUMSTANCES had combined to keep Colonel Severn away from England for a much longer period than he had anticipated. He had calculated that he might be back in four months at latest; but, when he arrived at his destination, by some strange chance the very person it was most important he should deal with directly had left for Australia on six months' leave. And this was not the only misadventure; there were other delays; so nearly a year had elapsed since he said good-bye to Elaine, and for his son's sake had refrained from telling his love or dwelling on any hope he had of winning for them both a happy future. How long and anxious a time it had been he scarcely realized until he stood once more in his own house and felt a question burning on his lips which he could not utter at once.

In his usual happy, gracious fashion Charlie was expressing his delight at his father's return, and never noticed his preoccupied expression.

"I hardly thought to find you here still. I thought you would be in town," said Severn at last.



“I ought to be there now—indeed must go in a few days; but—”

Charlie nodded comprehensively.

“I hoped you would have recovered from that old hopeless folly,” said Severn, sadly, rising from his chair and walking a little way apart to conceal his disappointment. He had trusted much—too much, it appeared—to the natural fickleness of youth; and during his long absence his one solace had been that it was at least giving his son more time to forget, so that the blow he must inflict—if hope had not misled him—would be somewhat softened.

“I don’t think you quite understand,” broke in Charlie, nervously. “All that is changed—quite changed: Elaine—”

“Loves you in return. I never dreamed of that!” exclaimed the colonel, blankly.

“Nor is it so. She will never love any one, I think. She is an angel, and quite beyond the reach of any mortal man.” Then, seeing that his father was quite unable to grasp the meaning of his broken sentences, he added shamefacedly, “It is some one else I care for—some one quite different, but so sweet and gentle that no one could help loving her. Father, you remember Mary Featherstone?”

“Do you mean to tell me that within a year you have fallen in love again in the very sight and almost in the hearing of the girl whom you professed to love before?”

“Oh, Elaine is not jealous, I assure you—not even piqued! She has sympathized with me from the first, and helped me in every way.”

In the excess of his joyful relief Severn laughed aloud. Now that he knew there was nothing to fear in this respect, and that the only barrier that he, at any rate, had to consider was removed, he could afford to look at the comical side of the situation.

“Upon my honor you had some self-possession to go to



her with such a story!" he declared at last; and his son had the grace to blush and proffer an explanation.

"You see she would never have loved me. I knew it was hopeless from the first; and there was a reason why she could not marry."

"If she be not fair to me,  
What care I how fair she be?"

quoted the colonel. "You are very fortunate, Charlie, to have your feelings so well under control."

"Besides, she is so much older than I."

"A year ago you thought that rather an advantage"—smiling in some amusement.

"I should have thought you would be pleased to know that I am growing wiser"—with a slightly aggrieved air.

"Is it wisdom? I could almost doubt it. But after all that is a question for your own consideration. Do you think Miss Featherstone will accept you, Charlie?"

"She has accepted me, or at least implied as much."

Severn crossed over to his son's side and laid his hand on his shoulder with a kindly pressure.

"Forgive me if I seemed unsympathetic. At my age thought travels more slowly than at yours, and I found it difficult at once to reconcile the state of affairs now with that which existed when I went away. But believe me, I have only your happiness at heart, and I think you will be happy. Mary Featherstone is too sweet and true a woman not to make a good wife; I shall welcome her very gladly as my daughter."

Charlie looked up with a pleased smile; if he had noticed a want of cordiality in his father's tone at first, he had not attributed it to any cause, and, now that it had disappeared, was not inclined to look any further into the matter.

"When do you think of being married?" asked the colonel, abruptly, thinking to himself, with some good-natured scorn for a fault that he had never shared, that, if the girl really valued her lover's allegiance, she had bet-



ter make it legally her own at once, before his fickle fancy ranged in new directions.

Charlie looked grave again at once.

“That is just what I don’t know. I have not seen her for nearly three weeks, and it may be another month before we meet. Why? Ah, I forget—you did not know that typhoid fever is in the village. Mary has been nursing some of the people, and is put in quarantine in consequence.”

“Has it been very bad?”

“Nine or ten cases at present. Only one has died besides the wretched woman who brought the sickness here.”

“And that was—?” carelessly interested in the reply.

“Mr. Bowyer’s house-maid.”

A sudden light flashed from George Severn’s eyes, a sudden dread kept him mute, though his very soul seemed to hang on the next few words that should be spoken.

“Mr. Bowyer has it now,” went on Charlie, quite unconscious of the emotion seething in his father’s heart—

“rather badly, I am afraid.”

“And—and Miss Warde?”

“She is nursing him.”

“Then she is well?”—with a reined-in anxiety that must have been apparent to one less self-absorbed than Charlie.

“Quite well; but she must be terribly worn out. Mr. Bowyer has a positive horror of strange faces about him, so she is doing everything for him herself.”

“Have you seen her since he was taken ill?”

The young man shook his head in some surprise.

“How could I do so? You forget that the whole house is placed out of bounds—is a forbidden district. Where are you going, sir?”

“I am going to see if I can be of any use,” was the calm reply.

“You don’t mean that as a reproach to me? You don’t think I was afraid of the infection?”



“My dear boy, no. For you to have gone would have been merely a senseless risk, and could only have added to her anxiety. Mr. Bowyer knows me, and would let me help to nurse him, I fancy. At any rate, I shall try it. If I am not back before night, send my man with some things, will you?”

Scarcely waiting for the answer, Colonel Severn snatched up his hat and went out quickly, passing through the hall, but quite forgetting to take an extra coat, though there was a hard frost and a keen east wind blowing.

He did not feel the cold—he did not once give a thought to the danger there might be in going to the house where the sickness was raging. Frequent cholera camps in India had familiarized his mind with the idea of infection, and, if it had been a plague-stricken city in which Elaine was dwelling, he would have gone to her all the same, and wasted no time in the going. Nothing could have kept him from her side; he had hungered for her presence too long, his patience and endurance seemed failing him at last.

The last few paces seemed miles to his hurrying feet; he could scarce restrain his impatience, and, when he found the outer door was open, he walked straight in, not waiting to summon any servant.

Without hesitation he turned into the sitting-room, feeling sure that he should find her there. Nor was he mistaken. She was kneeling in front of the fire, as much for rest as warmth, it struck the man who watched her so yearningly, for every line of her figure had fallen into an attitude of repose, and her head was leaning against the side of the mantel-piece as though too heavy, too weary to hold itself erect.

For a few moments he stood there, silently taking in every detail of herself and her surroundings, content for the time to know that she was near, not inclined to be prodigal of the pleasure that had been withheld from him so long. It was ecstasy sufficient to let his eyes linger on the well-



remembered form and the soft bright hair that he had seen so often in his dreams, waking as well as sleeping. One slim white hand lay on the dark rail of a chair beside her, and something in the sight moved him to a strange pity. It flashed upon him suddenly how often during the past year she must have needed love, perhaps in her thoughts appealing to him, but in vain. Had he been right to sacrifice himself for his son's sake, if in so doing he had also caused her pain?

No longer able to resist the longing to clasp her to his heart and with a kiss to wipe away the marks of all the tears she must have shed in her loneliness, he stepped forward impulsively, brushing against something as he moved and causing a slight sound.

Instantly she turned, then rose slowly to her feet, coming to meet him with outstretched hand and smileless lips, though an intensely happy light was shining in her eyes.

He too was very grave; the moment seemed too fateful for any outward show of joy, though in the hearts of both was a wild tempestuous gladness and neither doubted the feelings of the other. Not a word was needed, nor explanation.

Severn took her hands in his and drew her closer and closer, till the small fair head lay upon his breast; then he stooped and showered passionate caresses on her mouth.

Suddenly she broke away, a sharp fear chasing away the momentary warmth of color that had risen to her face at the contact of his lips.

"You ought not to be here!" she cried, alarmed.

"There is no more fear for me than you," he answered.

"That is quite different—it is my duty."

"And mine to be with you!"—looking into her eyes with loving persistence. "Besides," he added, as she still seemed doubtful and distressed, "the risk is run now; if any harm can happen, it will happen after this. But I am not afraid; nor need you be, I think. It is only nervous



subjects that take infection, and I have room in my mind for only one dear thought."

She raised her pale glowing face to his—half grateful, half inquiring, appreciating beyond expression the keen pleasure his presence was to her, though for his own sake she was unselfishly unwilling to allow him to remain.

"I mean to help you to nurse," went on the colonel, quietly. "Mr. Bowyer knows me, and won't mind my being in his room, I think."

"He is delirious, and knows no one," she told him sadly. "The doctor is with him now, but directly he has gone I must go to him again."

"Just to put your assistant into the way. So soon as I know exactly what to do I shall send you off for a long rest; now that I am here, you shall not have the lion's share of the work."

She smiled sweetly, too happy in his care to fight against his wish. Her lover's arm stole gently round her waist.

"Tell me, Elaine—did you miss me while I was away?"

"Miss you? Oh, so much! The time seemed endless; and then we so seldom heard of you; and—and I did not know you cared."

"Elaine!"

Only the single word, but she felt all the reproof it was meant to convey, and buried her head in his coat to hide the burning blush that suffused her face—for deep down in her heart had been the sweet assurance that she was dearer to him than any other.

"Never mind, my darling," he whispered, fondly. "All the trouble is over now—I hope forever; and think what a happy future lies ahead. I can scarcely believe in my own good fortune—that I, who all my life have been alone, should in the end have won so great a treasure as your love. Elaine, tell me it is true—really true that you love me, and are to be my wife."

For a moment she hesitated; all the old reasons why she



must never marry were as strong and uncombatale as ever, but they seemed to be fading into nothingness in comparison with her longing to be to him all that he desired. She could not say him nay—if they were to be divided, it must be his hand that should thrust them asunder. He was a man strong of mind and heart; he must decide the right and act upon it, she leaning on and trusting in his love. She would tell him all—all, however hard it might be for her to say and him to hear—and leave the issue in his hands.

“I love you,” she said, in the low clear tones that from the first had sounded so sweetly in his ear. “It is for you to determine whether I can ever be your wife.”

The doctor’s voice was heard above, and they moved away from each other as he came quickly down the stairs.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

THERE was no doubt that Mr. Bowyer was seriously ill—his life in danger. His constitution was utterly broken, and he had not strength to combat the disease, which was indeed of a very malignant type. Nor was it to be supposed that he would long remain ignorant of the small hope that was entertained as to his recovery. Naturally nervous about himself and prone to fits of depression, from the first he was low-spirited and despondent; but, when the illness became complicated with other symptoms, he seemed to grow calmer and more reconciled—or was it only that he resigned himself to the inevitable, and had attained to the courage of despair?

One day, when Colonel Severn was sitting at his bedside, he opened his eyes, and, the glance that wandered round the room showing that they were quite alone, he began to speak slowly and with difficulty, but coherently—for the delirium had left him, while the fever too was much lower than it had been for some time past.



“Severn,” he said, “is it true that your son has transferred his affections to Mary Featherstone?”

“Yes, it is so”—with no contrition on his son’s account—only gladness in his tones.

“And you are not sorry, I can see. Well, well, perhaps you are right—a woman’s name should not be even breathed on; but, in spite of everything, I tell you there is no sweeter, better girl in all the world than my Elaine.”

“I am not going to contradict you”—smiling. “Some day I hope she may be my wife.”

The sick man started in uncontrollable surprise, half raising himself on his elbow to look into the other’s face and assure himself that he heard aright. The colonel met his gaze with such composure, yet with such repressed ardor in his whole expression, that he could doubt no longer.

“Have you asked her?” he ejaculated in a whisper.

Severn nodded assent.

“And she did not refuse you?”

“Why should she?”—proudly. “She knows I love her; and I think she loves me too. Heaven bless her!”

“Has—has she told you anything of the past?”

“Nothing; and I wish to hear only what she chooses to tell.”

The old man sunk back weak and nerveless upon his pillows; the unusual effort to converse had tried him more than he knew; for the moment he seemed to lose all consciousness, until stimulants speedily applied restored him somewhat. Even then he lay for a long time motionless, utterly exhausted, only breathing slowly and with evident pain.

Severn, watching him pitifully, could not fail to see how near the end was and how fruitless were any hopes, though the doctor still spoke cheerfully of a possible if not probably change.

It was more than an hour later when, reopening his eyes, Mr. Boywer beckoned to his companion to come nearer.



Though he had appeared so powerless, his brain had not been inactive, and was obviously still following the same train of thought.

“Let her confide in you—tell her what to do. I acted for the best. I think now I was wrong. She will forgive—poor child!”

The broken sentences came in short gasps, and Severn peremptorily forbade him to say more. Enough had been said for him to understand that at some critical moment of her life Elaine had acted on the old lawyer's advice, and that now he feared he might have counseled wrongly.

When the doctor paid his next visit, he found his patient so much worse that he no longer held out any hope, and considered it his duty to warn the old man of the dangerous state that he was in, lest there should be any arrangements he might neglect before his death.

To his surprise, Mr. Bowyer evinced neither grief nor fear. He was a man of strange opinions. Not religious in the ordinary acceptation of the word, he had always endeavored to do his duty, performing many a kindly act in secret; and his view of the matter was that he stood as good a chance of salvation as those who, professing more, were still guilty of many an unrighteous deed. Nor did he prove inconsistent now that the time had come that the strength and truth of his theory must be tested; he had committed no crime, broken no law; even his faults were trivial ones, and had injured no one but himself; while he was the last man in the world to proclaim himself a miserable sinner against his own deep conviction. His only anxiety was lest he should die before he could make a new will; and at his own desire a telegram was at once sent off to Mr. Levison requesting his immediate presence.

This was about his last expressed wish. Afterward he seemed to sink rapidly; and neither Elaine nor Colonel Severn left him through that night.

When daylight dawned, they were watching still; and



Elaine first became conscious of an anxious glance that now and then was directed to her face. It was as though there were something weighing on his mind of which he longed to disburden himself.

The girl knelt beside him, and laid her head close to his.

“Is there anything you wish me to do for you?” she whispered.

Still the dumb beseeching gaze, but no spoken reply.

“Is it anything about Mrs. Priolo?” she hazarded.

But the sick man shook his head, and something in the satirical expression of his mouth reminded her of how he had so often looked when she had first known him. The tears came into her eyes, and her fingers tightened in their clasp of his thin hand as she remembered all the cause she had to feel both gratitude and love.

Severn rose softly from his chair and left them alone. As he did so the sick man motioned to Elaine to come nearer—nearer still. His voice was so weak and broken that, even with her ear almost touching his lips, she could scarcely comprehend his meaning.

“Tell me—I am dying—it can do no harm now to you or me—were you really guilty—really guilty of your sister’s death?”

The momentous question at last put into words that so often had trembled on his lips during the last three years, he lay quite exhausted and still upon his pillows, but with his eyes still fixed tenaciously on the girl’s white startled face.

“You thought it possible—you thought I could!” broke from her at last, in uncontrollable surprise and inexpressible reproach.

Her earnestness was so clearly sincere that he could not doubt. He knew then that from the first he had never done her justice; he had interfered to aid her escape from pure compassion and a vague idea of atonement for a wrong once done to another, not because he believed her innocent,



though incapable of proving that she was so; and ever since he had been a prey to the doubts and fears which were partly attributable to his ill-health and partly to a naturally suspicious disposition.

If he had only had the courage to ask her for the truth before, how much he might have been spared of mental agony and suspense!

Now the assurance received so late was not all relief; it had its element of bitterness as well, for he could not but feel ashamed of his own action in the matter, and knew that by his moral cowardice he had done her as well as himself incalculable harm.

“Forgive—forgive me!” he implored. “I was wrong—all wrong! Can you forgive?”

For answer she stooped and kissed him affectionately as his own child might have done, no trace of resentment on her face or in her heart. All his faults and mistakes were wiped out of her memory forever; she thought now only of his goodness to her—his love.

Presently he fell asleep from sheer weakness; and Colonel Severn, coming in, insisted on her going down to get a cup of tea. As she reached the foot of the stairs, the hall door, which stood ajar, was pushed further open, and some one entered rapidly in a heavy coat, with a small black bag in his hand.

It was Mr. Levison, arrived some hours before they had thought it possible he could come. He advanced hurriedly with outstretched hand.

“How is he?” he asked, with eagerness.

“Very weak; he can not live till night, the doctor says. We never thought you could be here in time.”

“Did I not tell you that when you summoned me I should be here as soon as human agency could bring me? I just caught the night-mail, and walked, or rather ran, from the station.”

She looked at him gratefully, appreciating his wish to be



kind, though really caring little for the pecuniary advantage which might accrue to her from his promptitude.

"He is asleep now," she observed, gravely.

"Then I will go upstairs and wait till he awakes."

"Won't you have some tea first? You must be exhausted after your long journey."

He smiled and shook his head.

"Business first," he replied, decisively. "By and by there will be plenty of time for refreshment."

But, when she persisted, he swallowed a cup of tea hastily, hurrying upstairs immediately afterward, as though grudging even that slight delay on her account.

Elaine remained alone. She took something to eat and drink in mechanical obedience to her lover's behest, as she would have done anything, however difficult, that he had commanded, then drew nearer to the fire to warm herself, for she was cold and numb with fatigue.

It had been a very trying time through which she had lately passed; and the worst of it was that in both instances her labor had been in vain. Poor little Jane had died in spite of all her care; and now Mr. Bowyer, her benefactor, to whom she owed so much, who had been to her as a father, was dying too. With no clear thought for the future, she could not but feel how by his death she would be left entirely alone, with the problem of her life to be solved anew; and even her lover's love could not console her for the impending loss.

Half an hour later she was called upstairs, and answered the summons with a beating heart, for she guessed what it portended.

When she entered the room, she saw George Severn standing by the bed; while the lawyer, with an expression of decorous satisfaction on his face, was gathering up his papers on a table a little way apart.

Severn turned as the door opened, and motioned to her to come near.



The sick man lay quite motionless on his pillows, and so pallid that for the moment Elaine thought he was already dead. Then his eyes opened. A film was creeping over them; but the girl stood exactly in his line of vision; and, as they rested on her, a strange light suddenly illumined his face, a momentary tremor shook his frame.

“Clara!” he cried out, in a clear voice—a last expiring effort.

The resemblance he had always seen to the woman he had once loved had deceived his flickering senses at the last; and, in the belief that she was near, uttering the name which for more than thirty years had never passed his lips, he died.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

LATER on in the day Elaine was in the sitting-room alone. Colonel Severn, leading her gently from the death-chamber directly all was over, had made her lie down on the sofa near the fire, and there she had cried herself to sleep.

When she awoke, the darkened room struck her with a strange pain; then, as slowly she remembered what had happened, she wept again as though her heart would break. It was more than mere grief that moved her to such a passion of tears; it was the reaction after so long a strain, the chilling sense of her labors being ended where formerly she had had so much to do. Life for the moment seemed utterly blank and motiveless.

George Severn pushed open the door softly and entered. Her face cleared, and she smiled sadly as she made room for him to sit beside her. Whether she would ever be his wife, or forfeit his affection forever by what she had to tell, the intense joy of knowing he had loved her once would remain with her forever.

Severn began to speak to her about the future, thinking



it well to lead her thoughts away from the present sorrow, and anxious too that she should understand her position. In any circumstances, he reminded her, it would be inadvisable for a young girl to live absolutely alone; and, as matters stood, he could not even visit at the house without giving cause for gossip. The only way of eluding this difficulty seemed to him to be their immediate marriage; and he urged this upon her earnestly, yet delicately, promising that the ceremony should be as quiet and private as she pleased.

At the first suggestion Elaine started, and her pale face, even in the semi-darkness, showed suddenly a vivid crimson. Then, as the color died away, a settled sadness came into her eyes and her mouth drooped piteously. She shook her head and clasped her hands tightly together, evidently in mental pain.

“You think it would seem disrespectful to the dead?” he asked her.

Again a gesture of dissent.

“He would have been the last to grudge me such happiness—such rest. No, it is not that.”

“Then, dearest, tell me what is the obstacle?”

Her face twitched nervously. Though she longed to tell him all, so that he might judge for himself whether the barrier that stood between them was insurmountable or no, she scarcely knew how to tell him, in what words to frame the truth.

“It is for your sake I hesitate,” she said at last, in a low voice that betrayed all the anguish of her mind.

He took her small clasped hands in his own strong reassuring hold.

“If it concerns me at all, you must let me judge for myself.”

A long silence, during which her eyes met his wistfully and inquiringly, as though she would read all the working



of his soul and judge beforehand how he would receive what she had to say.

“I seem to know you so little—so very little,” she said presently.

“That is a trouble only time can mend”—smiling to reassure her.

“But,” she continued, “I think I know one trait in your character. If I read it rightly, you are justly proud of an unstained name—a past that contains nothing that all the world might not know and could discuss as they chose.”

He bowed his head in half-surprised assent.

“I believe you to be so strong, so capable of self-forgetfulness,” she went on, hurriedly, “that, however dearly you loved, you would not wish to marry me if by so doing you linked the hitherto honored name with one upon which disgrace—disgrace, I say—had come. If it were only for your son’s sake you would draw back and realize the impossibility of such an act.”

“You think better of me—or is it worse?—than I deserve,” was the quiet reply. “In the matter of my marriage I should be utterly selfish; it is my own affair, and I should consult only myself in the matter. My son has equal freedom of choice.”

“Yet I remember,” she objected timidly, “that you were disturbed at the idea of his even becoming friendly with a woman of whom you knew nothing derogatory—only that she was an actress.”

“Ah, there I admit I was unpardonably narrow-minded! But I repented so quickly of my barbarism, going even at once to an opposite extreme, that I think you might forgive me that.”

It was impossible to resist the infection of his smile, but Elaine was too weary at heart for it to have more than a transitory effect. When she spoke, her manner was as grave as before.



“That I have been an actress you know; but there is a more serious disclosure that I have to make yet. Even I, who have had over two years to grow accustomed to the idea, still shudder when I remember that I—I, do you understand?—I, whom you ask to be your wife, have stood up before a crowded room to answer to the charge of murder—the murder of my own sister!”

Now at any rate she had succeeded in arousing him from the calm obstinacy with which he had meant to combat every objection she might raise. For anything like this he was not prepared, though he had nerved himself to hear the confession of something more than an ordinary fault of youth. He stood up to breathe more freely, and pushed the hair from his brow. It seemed as though space and air were both wanting.

“You are exaggerating surely!” he said, at length, not because he really thought so, but that she might add something to convince him of the reality of what had passed between them, for at present it was like a dream—a terrible dream.

Directly he released her hands, she raised them to cover her face, not daring to meet his gaze lest she should find in it horror or disgust. So she answered him now, shrinking away as though indeed guilty of the sin of which she had been accused.

“No; it is true—all true. It was only through Mr. Bowyer’s aid that I escaped from—from—”

He looked down at her with anxious, troubled eyes as the stammering speech remained uncompleted, and an irrepressible shudder at the memories raised shook her slight figure. What did it all mean? It could not be that she was really guilty; and yet—

“Still you are innocent, Elaine! I feel you must be!” he exclaimed, resolute to still those hateful, mocking voices that insisted on making themselves heard, though all his love and loyalty tried to hush them.



“Yes, I am innocent,” she answered, with a weary, hopeless quietude of manner that showed him as nothing else could have done how the burden she had borne for nearly three years had crushed her spirit. Realizing how strong the evidence had been against her, how even her benefactor, who had really loved her, had not been able to believe her free from guilt, she scarcely expected that any other would trust her mere word. She gave her answer to the question asked with no faith in its convincing power—only because some reply was required, and this was the truth, however unlikely it might seem.

His heart overflowing with compassion, Severn knelt down and put his arms about her.

“I believe in you; I love you all the more for what you have suffered; and, please Heaven, I will clear your name from that cruel, senseless charge!” he whispered, fondly, and gradually drew the bright bowed head on to his shoulder, kissing from her eyes all the tears that fell in the first passionate gladness of her relief.

He loved her still—he would save her from the danger that had threatened her so long; and all the bitterness that had grown up in her heart during the ordeal died away that moment.

“Let me hear everything from the very beginning; then I can judge how best to go to work—for I swear to you, Elaine, this mystery shall be solved, and you shall be your own bright self again.”

“I have thought sometimes—oftener of late—that I did wrong to run away; I should have waited and trusted in my innocence; but, oh, the agony of it was, in the first grief at my sister’s death, to stand before all those strangers, suspected of having caused it. And then, if I had failed to prove my story—”

“Hush, darling—do not grieve yourself! Perhaps all was for the best; and, had it not been as it was, we might never



have met. Is it very selfish to be glad that you came here, from whatever cause it happened?"

For answer she clung the closer to him, so happy in his love, so contented in his care, that the present seemed well worth all the sufferings of the past.

And so, her head resting on his breast, his arms about her, a refuge and very tower of strength, she told her story.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

ADA WARRINGTON'S charm of manner had been principally on the surface. She had been a spoiled child, and had grown into a selfish woman, the indulgence that her parents had shown her being continued after their death by an elder sister.

Tenderly and carefully as Elaine told her story, George Severn could not but see that from the very first she had sacrificed everything to please the willful beauty, who cared only for herself, and had never appreciated the affection lavished on her, or given even gratitude in return. The facts spoke for themselves, and needed no comment.

It had been Ada's wish to go upon the stage instead of choosing some more usual and unexceptionable means of earning a livelihood; and, though Elaine had resisted for some time, she had at last given in to her; for, in spite of her dislike to the publicity, she had herself a passion for theatricals, and was not so very difficult to persuade.

A more determined opposition Ada had still to encounter, for she was then engaged to the Reverend Robert Field, her father's curate, and he was naturally, both as a clergyman and a lover, averse from the step she wished to take. Deeply in love though he was, he still had seen her faults, and feared that the life she would lead if she became an actress would only foster her vanity and love of admiration, and disincline her, or even totally unfit her, for the quieter existence that was all he could offer to his wife. He



used every argument to dissuade her, but in vain, for Ada, thoughtless and child-like as she seemed, had a strong vein of obstinacy in her disposition, and, as usual, succeeded in gaining her own way.

What the curate dreaded came to pass. Ada's pretty flighty head was completely turned by the adulation she received, and the tears she had shed when she parted from her lover were dried and replaced by smiles sooner than even he had thought possible. It was fortunate that Elaine was with her to preach prudence and insist upon every propriety being observed, or the world, always censorious, and more especially prone to suspicion where a pretty actress is concerned, would certainly have found some cause for that condemnation which is so fatal to a woman's reputation. Then Gerald Weare came upon the scene—a young man belonging to the wealthiest family in Sydney, and possessed of a handsome fortune in his own right, besides some expectations. Directly the two sisters appeared in society he attached himself to them; and, after more than a month's most noticeable devotion, he proposed to the younger one.

To Elaine's indignation, Ada accepted him at once, with no mention of the promise that she had already given; and, when remonstrated with upon the deceit she had practiced, she retorted with those cruel words which had been brought forward at the inquiry after her death—

“ You are jealous because he loves me best.”

The taunt had contained the more bitterness because in a measure it was true. Elaine's fancy had been taken by the young fellow, whose attentions had always been pretty equally bestowed, and who had not been altogether guiltless of flirtation where she was concerned. Though he preferred the younger, gayer sister, he had not been always able to resist the pleasure of seeing the elder flush at his coming, and her lovely eyes droop shyly at his whispered words. Elaine had been the more prone to fall into the



mistaken idea that she was the cause of his frequent visits because Ada was not free, forgetting that this all-important fact, which might have changed the destinies of all, was not known to Mr. Weare. Her own pain—all the more hard to bear because she feared others must have observed and perhaps smiled at her folly—Elaine put bravely aside, resolved to conquer it in time; but all her womanly sympathy was aroused on Robert Field's behalf. He loved and trusted her sister, and now, with no previous warning, was to hear that all his love and trust had been in vain—that, even while he was planning how to provide a home for his promised wife, she had given herself to another.

Elaine could not contain the indignation she felt, and the hot words that passed between them neither forgave till for one forgiveness was too late.

Ada had declared that she herself would not write to confess her faithlessness to her former lover, and so it fell to Elaine to write the humiliating news.

Judging his feelings by her own, she was not surprised that she never received an answer to that letter. What could he say? He had not even the poor satisfaction that she had had of speaking out her thoughts; because he was a man—a gentleman—he must suffer his wrong in silence.

A week passed, during which the sisters never addressed each other except when absolutely obliged to do so—a week during which Gerald Weare was always with his *fiancée*; and Elaine stood apart, seeing the love she had thought to be her own lavished upon another.

Then one night—that fatal night—Ada had hurried from the theater and insisted on going alone through the public gardens, though Elaine had so far unbent as to beg to be allowed to go with her. The streets of Sydney were scarcely safe for any woman to traverse alone so late at night, and the pretty actresses had one admirer at least who would not be overscrupulous in the manner of his



wooing, on whose account the pistol had been procured and its use learned.

Against her earnest warning, Ada had gone, and the sisters had never met again.

This was all Elaine had to tell, and Colonel Severn remained for awhile in thoughtful silence. His own idea that she was suffering for the sake of some one whom she wished to shield was evidently a wrong one. He knew her to be as innocent as she had declared herself; but there was nothing in her story that would clear her to the world—indeed it would only go against her that, by her own confession, she had quarreled with her sister on account of Gerald Weare, jealousy being the motive power that caused so many crimes. It would be more difficult than he had supposed to prove her not guilty of the fearful charge against her.

Only one ray of light showed through the darkness. The young man, Robert Field, maddened by jealous pain, might have murdered his sweetheart rather than see her become the wife of any other. But at this suggestion Elaine smiled faintly. The young curate had not belonged to the Church militant by any means, and had had almost a womanish dread of destroying even insect-life. He was more likely to become a victim to melancholy madness.

“And you can think of no one else whom it would be possible to suspect?”

“No one. Ada was a favorite with every one—had never made an enemy in her life.”

“Did any one know of the existence of this other lover?”

“No one,” returned Elaine again; and then, suddenly remembering her last conversation with Gerald Weare, she added, hastily, “I am wrong. Some one must have known, for when Mr. Weare was here he spoke of it; but the knowledge had come lately.”

“Why do you think so?”

“Because he spoke so bitterly of her, and when he first



heard of her death he was broken-hearted. Poor fellow, he has altered terribly!" Then she told him what he had said that day—how, if ever again she were forced to defend herself, he could give evidence that would transfer suspicion to some one else. "Not," she said, gravely, "that we should lay too much stress on that, for, unless I misunderstood him, he meant Robert Field; and I am sure—quite sure—that he would not have raised a finger to hurt her—no, not to save his own life."

"It is always difficult to believe evil of those we have known well," he reminded her.

"I know that; and I have no means of proving what I believe to be true. It is only an idea, an intuition; but—"

"A woman's intuition is seldom wrong."

He spoke rather absently, his thoughts just then being far away with Gerald Weare. He remembered the young Australian's earnest professions of gratitude and friendship; and, though he would have claimed nothing on that account for himself, still he might do so for another—so much was at stake—and, however slight the information Weare might have to give, every little would help.

"Elaine," he said, abruptly, "would you mind my leaving you for a few days? I should like to see Mr. Weare myself and hear everything he has to tell. I shall be back in two or three days—before the funeral, of course. You might stay with Mary Featherstone—it is so dreary for you alone."

"No; I will stay here."

Thinking she was hurt at his leaving her just then, he hastened to explain.

"Dearest, it is for your sake I am going. I can not rest until your name is cleared and you have no longer cause for dread. Your face is far too sad; I want to see it brighter, as it must have been before this trouble came."

She looked up at him wistfully, the light of the sweet



gray eyes half drowned in a mist of tears; but her lips smiled bravely as she answered—

“I am happier in your love than I ever hoped, ever thought it possible to be. If I grieve, it is for you, to whom all this is new and so terrible. I thought I was strong enough to encounter fate; but now I feel that I should die if they came and took me away from you. Oh, George,” she cried, passionately, “I could bear the shame for myself, but not for you—oh, not for you!”

“That shame shall never come. I swear I will prove your innocence even before it is called in question. Elaine, believe me, there is no reason for this fear.”

Folded closely in his arms, the slight frail figure leaning against his broad form, and the weary head pillowed on his breast, the assurance bore with it even more weight than it deserved; but what woman has ever had the heart to measure her lover's words by the rules of probability and common sense? He was so strong, so eager to save her, she could not but believe in his ultimate success; besides, had he not succeeded before when she herself had seen no hope? Presently he had to say good-bye. It was growing late, and the proprieties had to be observed even at such a time.

“It is good-bye for three whole days, perhaps. Elaine, how I shall miss you!”

“And I you!” she whispered, fondly. “I never knew what love was till now.”

She had divined the thought that might torment him during his absence, and with loving tact resolved to spare him pain.

“Not when you loved Gerald Weare?”

“That was a fancy—a girl's romance—nothing more. The love I feel for you is stronger than myself, stronger than— Oh ”—with a sudden realization of the impotence of mere words—“it is stronger than anything in the world!”

He smiled at her vehemence—a happy smile from which



all anxiety had fled. It was true that the doubt had assailed him whether she could ever care for him as perchance she had cared for Gerald Weare; but now there was no longer room for doubt. In his heart were only happiness and hope.

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### CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON the second evening after Colonel Severn's departure he unexpectedly returned.

Elaine was in the sitting-room. She had steadfastly refused the invitation which the colonel had guessed would be forthcoming from the vicar's daughter, preferring to think out her thoughts alone. The doubt had rearisen, and was disturbing her anew, whether, if no further light were to be thrown upon that dark chapter of her life, it would not be her duty to sacrifice her own rather than risk her lover's happiness.

It was natural that she should take a gloomy view of the future in her present dismal surroundings—the dead man lying upstairs, the home of the last two years broken up, and the ever-present dread that when Mrs. Priolo heard the news she would return, and that now there was no protection against her malice.

But her heart beat tumultuously with sudden hope as she heard Severn's quick footstep on the gravel walk. She sprung up, and the next moment was in his arms in the hall.

“Well?” he asked, at length, in a happy, ringing voice, holding her away a little so that she might see the brightness in his eyes and guess how matters were.

“George, it can not be—it is too soon for—that!”

“It is not too soon; and my darling may hold her head as high as she pleases and fear no one on this earth. The cloud has passed away, and the future shall be as full of happiness as love can make it.”



“You—you mean—”

“I mean that the man who is accountable for your sister’s death has confessed at last. Your name is free from even the shadow of a stain.”

The sudden revulsion of feeling was so great that for a moment she reeled and swayed helplessly in his arms. He led her back into the sitting-room, and put her gently into an easy-chair.

“It is too strange—too good to be true,” she gasped, breathlessly.

“Tell me—am I not the best detective in the world?” he asked, gayly.

“I want to know all about it, from the very beginning.”

“It is a strange story. When Weare was down here, he told you how I happened once to save his life, and a dozen times he professed his gratitude to me, and swore that some day he would repay me in kind. Well, I went to his address in London, and by good luck found him, though he was on the point of starting off for Paris—from there goodness knows where. I told him all—how we loved each other, and that the only barrier between us was the unexplained mystery of your sister’s death, imploring him to tell me anything he knew. You know his impulsive way. He caught hold of my hands and wrung them hard. ‘I always told you I would prove my gratitude,’ he said. ‘You saved my life—it is yours to do with as you choose. I shot Ada Warrington because she was untrue.’ ”

A low cry burst from Elaine’s pale lips. All these years, exhaustively as she had considered the matter, this solution of the enigma had never suggested itself to her. That he, her sister’s lover, who had appeared so broken-hearted at her death, could have been its cause seemed too horrible to believe.

“It is not true—it can not be! He is saying so to save me, sacrificing himself from a mistaken sense of gratitude.”

“I thought so myself at first, but he managed to per-



suade me at last that it was not quixotism, but the actual terrible fact.”

Taking a large white envelope from his pocket, he placed it in Elaine's hand.

“Here is a confession that he particularly wished you to read. He said it would explain his conduct, though it could not excuse it.”

She drew out a sheet of closely written paper and read it aloud. Her voice faltered, but the perfect silence that reigned about them made every word distinct.

“Though every tongue may execrate me when the truth is known, there is only one for whose opinion I care, and this perhaps because she is the only one who has real cause to think of me with contempt and scorn.

“That I killed Ada Warrington seems to me an act that circumstances justified; but nothing can pardon or extenuate the fact that by my own cowardly dread of exposure I have spoiled her sister's life. It is she only who has the right to condemn.

“When Elaine Warrington stood up before those idiots who believed her guilty, and I saw her slowly realizing the terrible suspicion that was in their minds, I suffered more than I ever shall again, even if I expiate my crime by death. To remain silent while she bore the burden of my sin—to feel myself so weak and miserable a wretch—was even worse than if others had known my meanness and scorned me for it—for I was judge and culprit in one. No other will ever view me in so despicable a light. But I was resolved that, unless it was a case of an innocent person's dying in my stead, I would not speak—I would not give my life for her unworthy one. While they thought me grieving for her love I was inwardly reviling her memory, heaping imprecations on the false woman who had wrecked my happiness.

“I had thought her so sweet and true, so child-like and artless in her frank admission of her love for me. From



the first her evident pleasure at my coming had flattered my vanity, and gradually it awakened something deeper in my heart—only gradually. For a long time I was in doubt as to which sister I preferred, and, coxcomb that I was, tried to make myself acceptable to both. Each was so charming in her different style—Elaine with her shy dignity and semi-prudish demeanor and the deep gray eyes that betrayed a passionate loving soul, Ada with her happy gayety of heart, every feeling on the surface, and her pretty winning ways that subjugated nearly every man with whom she came in contact.

“In such a state of indecision, it takes little to turn the scale. One day I came upon Ada unexpectedly alone in a secluded part of the public gardens, and she placed both hands impulsively in mine, and smiled up into my face, apparently so unaffectedly pleased at the meeting that my whole heart went out to her in return.

“It was the first time we had been quite alone, and not a creature was in sight. I caught her in my arms, and, kissing her with eager passion, I begged her to be my wife.

“She consented. Not a word was said of the young country curate whom she had also honored with the promise of her hand and the assurance that he possessed her love. Gerald Weare, the son of the wealthiest man in Sydney, was too eligible a *parti* to risk losing by such untimely candor. I thought myself the happiest man in all the world, but was not long in finding out my error.

“One night she had arranged to walk home with me from the theater; but when I arrived there, some minutes before the appointed time, she was already gone. Certain of finding her waiting, I had gone straight in, and by some strange chance the first thing that met my eyes was Elaine’s pistol. I took it up, and, examining it carelessly, found it loaded. Slipping it into the pocket of my overcoat, I went out again, and, dismissing the brougham in which I had come straight from a dinner-party, walked on



with a half hope of overtaking the sisters before they reached home. Afterward I changed my mind, believing it would be a hopeless quest, and, turning off the road, took a short cut back through the public gardens. They were naturally almost deserted at that hour; but I met a few people, none however whom I knew. It was a fine night, but rather a high wind was blowing, and every now and then the tails of my tight overcoat—weighted by Elaine's pistol—were blown against my legs. I took out the pistol and carried it in my hand.

“Suddenly, as I walked along quietly, I saw through the trees two figures that the moonlight made clear. One was Ada; I recognized her at once by her white frock and big straw hat—for she was very fond of white, and had come out in summer clothing before any one else. Who the other was I could not guess, and a jealous instinct made me go nearer to discover. Close as I advanced toward them, they never heard, never saw me, so deeply were they interested in each other; and I—I was struck dumb and motionless. The woman who had lain upon my breast, whose lips of her own accord had pressed my own, was bewailing her hard lot to this her former lover. She was marrying me for my money, because she could not face the evils of poverty—no, not even with him. He spoke earnestly, kneeling at her feet and suing with almost unmanly humility for the promise that was already perjured once. But she was firm—though a very child in manner, Ada could be obstinate enough where her own welfare was concerned. She wept, and again and again assured him that she could never love another—but she would marry me.

“And I all the while was listening. As in a dream their voices fell upon my ear; but their meaning was clear enough. She threw her arms about his neck in almost despairing abandonment when, out of patience at last, he said good-bye. Had she even then relented, I would have forgiven her; but she returned at once to her stubborn re-



fusal, and repeated the words, 'I can not face poverty—not even with you.'

"He went, and, as he walked away quickly, she stood watching him with an agonized look, but making no sound, no gesture to call him back.

"Then she turned—to face me.

"She never uttered the lie that was doubtless already on her lips; she never spoke a word of repentance or defiance. The pistol was in my hand; without hesitation I raised it, took aim, and fired, with one shot ridding the world of the falsest woman that I believe ever drew breath.

"Directly she fell, I threw away the weapon and went home with head erect and no sense of fear—not a vestige of remorse in my heart. I thought I had done well and justly, and forgot there was any need to avoid detection. That I escaped was a lucky chance, not the effect of any deep-laid plot.

"The next morning I saw things clearer, and realized that others would not look at the matter in the same light as I did. I determined hastily on my plan of action. When the news was brought in, I simulated so well the sorrow I did not feel that not a breath of suspicion ever rested on me. I heard Elaine Warrington spoken of as the probable murderess of her sister, and held my peace. Being innocent, I had no doubt but that she could prove herself so, and, if the worst came to the worst, I could save her.

"To allow another man to bear the odium of a crime I had committed would have been against the commonest principles of honor; but this was a woman; and just then I felt that the sex deserved no mercy at my hands.

"It is no tardy remorse that nerves me now. I would have carried my secret with me to the grave had it not been that the happiness of the man who saved my life—the one being in the world whom I esteem and like above all others—depended upon my speaking the whole truth.



Of my crime I do not repent; were Ada Warrington to stand before me once more, false yet fair as of old, I would raise my hand again and fire. I am ashamed only of my selfish cruelty toward Elaine, and pray with all my heart that she may accept this my atonement, though offered not on her account, but another's. If she forgives me, I can bear the contumely of others, and feel already another being since I have resolved to face the consequences of my own act, the act I still deem a right and just one."

The letter was signed and attested by two witnesses.

As Elaine was reading the last page a ring came from the hall door, and presently there was a sound of voices outside. But just then she could think only of the one thing, and scarcely noticed, though she heard.

"George," she whispered, anxiously, "you have not given him up?"

"I? No, child. In his enthusiasm he was eager to go before a magistrate at once, but I would not allow it. We came at last to an agreement that the confession should never be used against him unless you yourself were threatened with any danger, and even then he should have three clear days' notice to elude his pursuers."

"And now I need no longer fear. Oh, George, it seems like a happy, happy dream!"

"A dream from which you shall never wake. You will need a double portion of gladness, Elaine, to compensate you for these years of sorrow."

She smiled tenderly. Surely no words were needed to tell how thoroughly she trusted in his care, how she rested in his love! Then a sudden shadow came across the brightness.

"If Mrs. Priolo should come," she began; and, even as she spoke, as though invoked by the mention of her name, like an evil spirit responding to an incantation, the door opened and Mrs. Priolo stood upon the threshold.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. PRIOLO entered the sitting-room with an air of defiance—the air of one who knows that she has the best of the position—and, without waiting for an invitation, only vouchsafing a grim “How d’ye do?” sat down beside the fire.

“It is bitterly cold,” she said, looking round leisurely.

“It is indeed. This winter has been a very severe one,” answered Elaine, gently.

Colonel Severn stood erect, disdaining even an appearance of friendliness, ready at a moment’s notice to do battle on his lady-love’s behalf.

There was a short silence; then Mrs. Priolo spoke again—

“I have come to look after my own interests.”

“I don’t think there is any one anxious to defraud you,” ejaculated Severn, sharply.

She turned with a jerk and faced him.

“I am not so sure of that. A lawyer has been here and a fresh will made, I hear; but I am not at all put out by that.”

No one answered, and she went on, vehemently—

“Last time we discussed matters you had the advantage, colonel. You made me sign a confession of what I had done in the matter of that arsenic. Have you that paper safe?”

“It is at my lawyer’s.”

“And is not worth the ink it was written with. There is not a soul in England for whose opinion I care now that Mr. Bowyer is dead. You can make what use you please of it, Colonel Severn; and I shall observe the same freedom of action as regards the knowledge I possess.”



"You will do as you please, of course," said Severn, quietly.

Her eyes were fixed intently on his face, and she saw at once that his calmness was not assumed, that he really was indifferent to her threat. She thought it would have fallen upon them like a live shell, and was somewhat disconcerted by this rebuff where she had expected to have it all her own way. Then she glanced at Elaine, and took courage from her pale anxious face.

"You think," she went on, maliciously, "that, because a will has been executed in your favor, you are mistress of the situation; but we shall see."

"I am quite sure," said Elaine, her sweet clear tones sounding in pleasant contrast to the other's angry shrillness, "that Mr. Bowyer will not have forgotten the faithful service of so many years."

"You may call it 'service' if you choose," answered the woman impertinently; "but you can't get rid of the fact that I am his sister-in-law, the only connection he had in the world."

Elaine did not reply; and Colonel Severn also maintained silence, tugging at his long mustache with an air of being bored that the housekeeper found infinitely galling.

"You take the matter with a high hand," she cried; "but you may find yourself in the wrong box after all. Perhaps you are not aware that criminals forfeit all right of property? When I tell all I can, I'd like to know what good Mr. Bowyer's money will do either of you then."

Colonel Severn stepped forward hastily and placed a protecting arm round Elaine's waist.

"To whom do you refer under that insulting name?" he asked haughtily.

"To Elaine Warrington, who murdered her sister nearly three years ago at Sydney."

"Pshaw! You know as well as I do the utter absurdity of that accusation."



“If she is innocent, she will have to prove it”—doggedly.

“That she can easily do. The real murderer has confessed; she holds the confession in her hand.”

The housekeeper stared at the paper blankly, the conviction coming slowly to her that the value of her secret knowledge was indeed gone. In her own heart she had never really believed Elaine guilty; it had seemed too improbable that the girl who was always—even to her, in spite of provocation—so sweet-tempered and gentle should have taken the life of any one, above all her own sister. It had been to her interest to affect suspicion and doubt, and she had pretended so long as almost to persuade herself that she was just in her condemnation; but, now that the charge was denied, she was convinced at once. She made a last effort to retain the advantage she had thought she possessed.

“Then I am at liberty to tell the lawyers all I know?” she observed pleasantly, rising from her seat as she spoke.

“Oh, no, no, no!” burst from Elaine’s white lips; and the colonel hastened to explain.

“Miss Warrington is not speaking for her own sake, but another’s. If she is accused, she will be forced in self-defense to give up the name of the real murderer.”

“And that she does not wish to do?”—shrewdly.

“And that she does not wish to do.”

“I would give anything not to do it!” cried Elaine, impulsively.

“Anything in reason,” supplemented Colonel Severn, with a warning pressure on her arm.

But Mrs. Priolo had taken in the situation at a glance, and saw that she might still make capital of her knowledge.

“You wish to buy my silence?” she said, quietly.

“If you are willing to sell it.”

“That would depend on the terms offered.”



“What would you consider a fair price?” asked Colonel Severn, unable to keep an accent of scorn from his voice, though anxious to conciliate her, if possible, on Elaine’s account, and because of the man whom he had once called friend.

“All Mr. Bowyer’s fortune would not be too much to ask, considering all things.”

“What things?”

“Why, that Miss Warrington—or Miss Warde, if you prefer it—will have as much money as she will want as Mrs. Severn, and you would rather that your wife brought you a name unsullied by suspicion and with no taint of publicity attached than any fortune, however large.”

“If that be so, I should sacrifice my own inclination for the sake of what I thought right.”

“You mean that you decline to give up all Mr. Bowyer’s money?”

“I do decline.”

“It is not my desire to be unduly grasping or unfair. If Miss—Miss Warde chooses to share—”

“I think,” broke in Colonel Severn, impatiently, “it would save time and trouble if I were to state at once what I am prepared to offer on Miss Warrington’s behalf. As to halving her fortune with you, that would be absurd; but she is willing to pay you well for your silence. Whatever Mr. Bowyer leaves you she will double. Am I right in promising so much, Elaine?”

She bowed her head, feeling just then incapable of speech. It had been a trying interview to her, and she was longing for its close. Her limbs were trembling beneath her, and she leaned heavily against her lover for support.

Mrs. Priolo hesitated. She was pondering in her own mind the expediency of accepting the offered terms. Mr. Bowyer might have left her only a mere pittance—only enough to keep her from actual want—if he had thought her absence at the time of his death a cowardly desertion;



but then, on the other hand, he might have believed in the truth of her excuse, and in that case left his fortune divided between Elaine and herself, as had been originally intended. Was it worth the risk, or should she bargain for a fixed sum?

A gambling instinct—a remnant perhaps of the old reckless days when she was bar-maid at Montreal—prompted her to do as he had suggested, the natural malice of the woman delighting in the idea that he might be caught in his own net; for she knew, however it might turn out, he would keep his word.

She glanced irresolutely at his face, and saw that he was not inclined to parley with her longer. Then, looking at Elaine, she saw that her eyes were full of the excitement and the anxiety which she could not conceal. The old housekeeper felt that if she could have dealt with the girl alone she might have made her own terms.

Colonel Severn's stern tones, reminding her that they were waiting for a reply, hurried her decision.

"I accept," she said, and stopped short.

Weak from the fatigue of the past month, and overcome by the sensation of relief after the intense strain upon her nerves, Elaine had fainted.

While Colonel Severn laid her upon the sofa and applied such restoratives as were within reach, the housekeeper stood on one side, and making no offer to assist.

"I suppose I can go to my old room?" she said, presently.

"You can go where you please!" shouted the colonel, with what sounded like an oath.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

Two days later the funeral took place—a quiet unostentatious ceremony, only sparsely attended, for Mr. Bowyer had been little known, and the village was just then taken up with its own troubles. The severe winter had been keenly felt by the poor people, and then, as a last straw, small-pox had broken out among them, and, though no one belonging to the village had died, many had been dangerously ill. But brighter days were dawning now. The lord of the manor had come back, and was doing all that was possible to alleviate their distress; besides which, the disease, which had alarmed rather than actually harmed them, was slowly but surely dying out.

Colonel Severn had gained Elaine's consent to a speedy marriage; and it had been arranged with the vicar that his daughter should follow them very shortly to the sea-side place whither they were going, and that Charlie Severn should accompany her as her avowed lover. So far all seemed bright enough; but Elaine could not enjoy her assured happiness while the housekeeper was present to remind her of the dark page in her past. She was almost as troubled on Gerald Weare's account as she had been on her own, and thought it a point of honor to guard even more carefully than before against the chance of detection.

Mrs. Priolo had kept very much to herself since that first interview. Pushing and venturesome as she was, she could not help being overawed by the colonel's quiet demeanor and the resolute way in which he relegated her to her former inferior position in the household. For the first time in her life she was afraid to be intrusive or impertinent, though she longed to make them both feel her power. But she understood the necessity of not trying



their patience to the utmost, never doubting for a moment the truth of Colonel Severn's assertion that they held the proofs of Elaine's innocence in their hands, and refrained from making them known only for the sake of another. She was aware that they could afford to defy her if they chose; so she remained quiescent, trusting to the hope that more might be left her in the will than any one suspected, and that this, according to the promise made, would be doubled.

Directly they returned from the cemetery Mr. Levison led the way to the sitting-room. A cab was waiting outside to take him to the station, as he was in a hurry to return to town; so without delay he broke the seal of a roll of paper in his hand, and began to read the contents aloud.

Severn and Elaine were seated on the sofa, and Mrs. Priolo, who had followed them in, took a chair close to the lawyer—so close that she could by leaning forward lean over his shoulder.

The will was a very simple one, and as short as it could be without being illegal. Everything the dead man had possessed was left unreservedly to Elaine, to do with as she thought fit. No one else was mentioned.

Mrs. Priolo's face of blank amazement turned to absolute fury as she realized that all her scheming, all her plans, had been in vain.

"Do you mean to say," she asked, tremulous with wrath, "that nothing is left to me?"

The question was merely uttered as a vent to her feelings, for she had seen for herself that only the one name was written—the name of the girl whom she had so persecuted and maligned, and who therefore could not be expected to show her any generosity in return.

"Mr. Bowyer was very weak when he made this will. He said he could trust Miss Warde to do all that he would wish for the servants."



“Servants!” cried Mrs. Priolo, furiously. “I was his own brother’s wife!”

Mr. Levison bowed politely, but remained silent.

Elaine rose quickly, and, crossing the room, laid her hand lightly on the woman’s sleeve.

“You need not be afraid. Anything that in fairness you can demand I will not refuse.”

Mrs. Priolo shook off her hand violently, and, mistaking her gentle sympathy for fear, was encouraged to do her worst.

“Don’t touch me, murderess!” she hissed between her clinched teeth, an evil light of gratified malice gleaming in her eyes.

Elaine tried to speak, but could not. It was Severn who came and stood beside her to refute the accusation.

“You are uttering a wicked libel, and you know it,” he declared, sternly.

Mr. Levison hastened to interpose.

“It is not necessary that Miss Warde should be defended from such a charge,” he said, gravely.

“If you won’t listen, there are others that will! I’ll move heaven and earth before I’ll allow that unjust will to stand! I tell you that three years ago Miss Warde, as you call her, or Elaine Warrington, as she was known then, fled from Sydney because she could not prove her innocence of what I accuse her of!”

She looked like a Fury, with her thin spiteful face, and a few locks of dingy gray hair escaping from her bonnet, while one arm was extended in vehement denunciation, and her voice had risen to a shriek.

Colonel Severn’s quiet tones in reply came as a relief to all.

“But she can prove it now. Mr. Levison, may I request your perusal of this?”—handing the same paper that Mrs. Priolo had seen in Elaine’s hand two days before, and a telegraphic envelope as well.



“It is unnecessary—quite unnecessary, I assure you,” protested the lawyer. “This is raving madness—nothing less.”

“Unfortunately it has a foundation of truth. The fact is correct that three years ago Elaine Warrington, my promised wife, escaped from Sydney because she could not defend herself from the charge of having murdered her own sister; but since then the real murderer has confessed—”

“Oh, hush—hush! Have you forgotten your promises?” cried Elaine, breathlessly.

“I am absolved from it by death. Just as we were starting for the cemetery this morning a telegram was given into my hand, telling me that Gerald Weare had been in that railway accident between London and Dover, and had died from the effects. He had desired that the information might be conveyed at once to me. Poor fellow, it was a happy deliverance for him; and, Elaine, it is a deliverance for you! I have given these papers into Mr. Levison’s hand so that he may communicate with the police at Sydney and the mystery of your sister’s murder may be cleared up.”

Elaine burst into tears—welcome tears that eased her heart and came as a passionate relief after the anxious strain of so many weary months. Severn, with his arm around her waist, soothed her as best he could.

Mr. Levison, with his back toward them, rapidly read through the papers intrusted to his care, while Mrs. Priolo eagerly scanned his face to see if all hope was gone. His expression of absolute satisfaction showed her that it was indeed so—that, well and warily as she had played her cards, she had by unforeseen chances missed success. Honesty in this case would have been the best and most paying policy.

Mr. Levison shook hands with Colonel Severn and Elaine, congratulating them heartily, and promising them



a speedy settlement of their affairs. As he left the room Mrs. Priolo also rose to go, feeling that nothing could be gained by remaining.

“George,” whispered Elaine, “she is nearly penniless, I am afraid.”

“She deserves to be so,” muttered the colonel, angrily; but, obedient to her wish, which he guessed instinctively, he called the woman back.

She turned and faced him defiantly, expecting a rebuke.

“Miss Warrington does not desire that you should go entirely unrewarded for your services, though you forfeited all gratitude from Mr. Bowyer by your cowardly desertion of him in the hour of danger, and certainly deserve no consideration from herself. To keep you from actual want she will allow you an annuity of two hundred a year; and that will do away with the necessity of seeking any other employment, and perhaps working to others the harm you have worked here.”

“I am sure, sir, from whatever motive given, I am grateful for your help; and I wish you and Miss Elaine every happiness and—”

“That will do—that will do!” interrupted Severn, feeling that blessings from such a source might have an evil effect.

With a bland expression such as she could assume when it suited her purpose to be conciliatory, and with a low respectful courtesy, Mrs. Priolo withdrew; and with her went the last shadow of Elaine’s life. The future would be all joy, all peace, with only those minor troubles which serve to accentuate the happiness they can not disturb.

Often it seems that the greater the pain, the sweeter and fuller is the compensation.

THE END.





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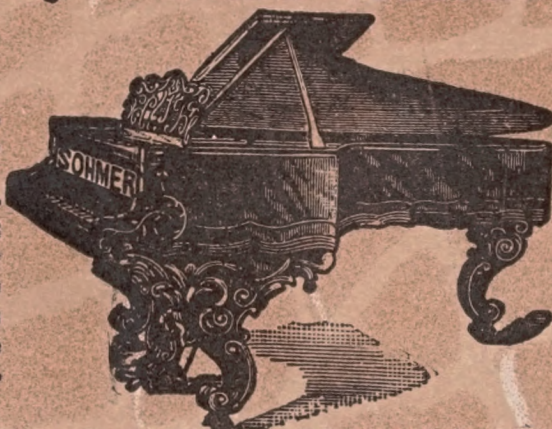


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